

MDP SB 635 Support Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Andrew Wilson

Position: FAV



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.

SB 635 Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossing

Uploaded by: Cait Kerr

Position: FAV

Tuesday, March 4, 2025

TO: Brian Feldman, Chair of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee; and Committee Members

FROM: Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, State Policy Manager; Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations

POSITION: Support SB 635 Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports SB 635 offered by Senators Lewis Young and Rosapepe. SB 635 seeks to formalize the Maryland Connectivity Coalition to collaborate with the State Highway Administration (SHA) and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to identify and advance priority wildlife crossing projects. The intent is to reduce road impacts on imperiled species and reduce wildlife vehicle collision risks for motorists.

The bill also creates a Wildlife Highway Crossings Fund to support wildlife crossing projects and the research needed to determine the most strategic locations for crossings. SB 635 aims to incorporate wildlife movement and habitat connectivity into counties and municipalities' comprehensive land use plans and provide local governments with updated information on state connectivity plans. It also places emphasis on education and outreach regarding wildlife collisions and the importance of habitat connectivity. By addressing the high number of animal-vehicle collisions, SB 635 moves Maryland toward a safer future for both people and wildlife.

Many species in Maryland can benefit from less expensive wildlife crossing solutions, such as underpasses that can often be built using existing structures like culverts and bridges. Virginia has already seen the benefits of underpasses – by monitoring wildlife-vehicle collisions before and after erecting directional fencing to funnel deer to culverts along I-64, deer-vehicle collisions in the area fell by an average of 92% after the fencing was installed. In just under 2 years, the benefits of these culverts with exclusionary fencing exceeded the costs of fencing, with an average savings of \$2.3 million per site.

The section of the Appalachians running through West Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania is a critical corridor for species migrating in response to climate change. This section, known as the Allegheny Front, is a priority landscape to preserve the rich biodiversity of the larger Appalachian range as climate change drives species to move and adapt. Serving as a habitat bridge between vast conservation lands in the southern and northern Appalachians, the Allegheny Front plays a critical role in keeping this continental ecosystem connected. By providing safe passage across roadways, we can better protect migratory species traveling through this important corridor.

The precipitous decline in biodiversity is a global challenge, it is jeopardizing food and water supplies – we must all do our part to find solutions that safeguard biodiversity. TNC commends Senators Lewis Young and Rosapepe on introducing this bill, which aims to protect Maryland's rich biodiversity, while also reducing wildlife collisions' safety and economic impacts on our roadways.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on SB 635.

SB0635 FAV Dorothy Broadman.pdf

Uploaded by: Dorothy Broadman

Position: FAV

Testimony on: SB0635, *Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act*
Committee; Education, Energy and Environment
Hearing Date: March 4, 2025
Position: Support

I support this bill because it saves both human and wild animal lives while yielding societal net cost savings.

The number of vehicle/wild animal accidents has been well-documented, including the number of human injuries/deaths and the costs. Building wildlife crossing have been shown to not just save lives, but to also yield a societal net financial benefit.

Experts in many disciplines came together last year to develop a consensus document about these crossings. It includes recommendations for the development of climate-informed wildlife crossings for both human and animal well-being.¹

The Federal government has numerous funding programs, some requiring matches, some not, that can be drawn upon.^{2, 3} Even if the current administration cuts the funding, it will only be temporary.

I note that passing this legislation will set us up for a future time when the State budget allows funding. It does not include a provision for direct funding at this time. In the meantime, Federal funding can be accessed.

Please vote in favor of this much needed bill, SB0635.

Thank-you,

Dorothy Broadman

¹ Multiple Consensus Authors, [Joint Statement Regarding Climate-Informed Wildlife Crossing](#), Pew Charitable Trust, February 14, 2023.

² U.S. Department of Transportation: Federal Highway Administration, [Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program](#).

³ 3.National Parks Conservation Association, Wildlands Network, ARC Solutions, [IJA-Wildlife-Infrastructure-Funding-Guide](#).

SB635.Audubon_Fav.WildlifeCrossings.pdf

Uploaded by: Jim Brown

Position: FAV



Maryland Office
2901 E. Baltimore St
Baltimore, MD 21214

February 28, 2025

To: Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Maryland Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

From: Jim Brown, Policy Director, Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland SB 635, Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings

Audubon Mid-Atlantic submits this testimony in support of Senate Bill 635. Audubon Mid-Atlantic is the regional presence of National Audubon Society, representing over 35,000 Marylanders who advocate for the protection of birds, bird habitat, and policies aiming to protect both birds and human communities in the face of increasing environmental challenges, habitat loss, pollution, and climate change. We work with partner organizations, government agencies, and local communities to protect birds and the places they need to survive now, and into the future.

Science tells us birds are in decline due to habitat loss and fragmentation. 1/3 of all Maryland bird species experienced significant population declines in the past 50 years. Roadways and other forms of human development contribute to this fragmentation. We support SB 635 because it increases collaboration between state agencies, establishes a wildlife connectivity fund, promotes public awareness, and prioritizes sustainable growth, all with the goal of protecting threatened wildlife, improving public safety, and preventing habitat fragmentation.

By putting protections in place that identify and prioritize efforts to prevent fragmentation, Maryland will be setting a standard of land-use planning that will bring added protections to birds and all of the co-benefits that birds bring us. It will hold Maryland up as a national leader in conservation planning.

Audubon Mid-Atlantic respectfully urges a favorable review of SB 635.

Thank You,

Jim Brown
Policy Director
Audubon Mid-Atlantic

WildlifeConnectivityConservActASCMTestimonySB06354

Uploaded by: Julie Dunlap

Position: FAV



Committee: Education, Energy, and Environment

Testimony on: SB0635—Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act of 2025

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 4, 2025

The Audubon Society of Central Maryland (ASCM) is a 501C3 nonprofit with a mission to protect birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. As owner and manager of two wildlife sanctuaries in Frederick County, we understand the crucial need for wildlife habitat interconnectivity to support abundant and diverse populations. With our community's dedication to conserving and restoring biodiversity, ASCM strongly supports SB0635, the Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act of 2025.

In his award-winning book *Crossings: How Road Ecology is Shaping the Future of Our Planet*, Ben Goldfarb asserts, "To us, roads signify connection and escape; to other life forms, they spell death and division." (Goldfarb, 2023) In Maryland, an estimated 33,000 deer plus countless foxes, raccoons, turtles, cats, frogs, dogs, Monarch butterflies, and other creatures are killed annually on our roadways. Further, roads and other infrastructure block seasonal migration and movement to breed, feed, disperse, and find shelter. If prevented from travel by roads and other barriers, wildlife become isolated in small patches of habitat that may lack sufficient resources for procreation or survival. And because wildlife are major agents in seed dispersal, plant populations can also shrink due to habitat isolation by roads.

Since the 1960s, ecologists have understood that the size of habitat islands tends to be directly proportional to their ecological abundance and diversity. (MacArthur and Wilson, 1967) Research has also confirmed that connecting fragmented habitat islands, such as small parks and private sanctuaries, with tunnels, bridges, and other crossings, can help formerly isolated habitats reconnect and begin functioning like larger protected landscapes. (Tewkesbury, et al., 2002) When designed with organisms' ecology and behavior in mind, these structures can reconnect wildlife populations to enhance survival and foster genetic health, while supporting natural plant dispersal and avoiding life and property losses from vehicle collisions.

In Florida, wildlife crossings are being used effectively to extend the habitat availability for the critically endangered Florida panther. Similarly, Idaho is developing a network of

P.O. Box 660
Mt. Airy, MD 21776
www.centralmdaudubon.org



bridges, tunnels, culverts, and fencing to protect drivers and reconnect habitat torn apart by expanding road systems. Understanding of the importance of habitat connectivity is growing locally, nationally, and globally. This year, Maryland can begin fostering our own biodiversity, abundance, and public safety by establishing a Wildlife Connectivity Fund and beginning the overdue process of reducing barriers to wildlife and plant dispersal through much-needed crossing infrastructure.

ASCM's members throughout Howard, Carroll, and Frederick counties care about wildlife diversity and abundance throughout the state. We also know that the rich ecological communities in our wildlife sanctuaries, enjoyed by visitors from around the state every day, depend on the health of plants and animals in surrounding farms, woodlands, parks, and neighborhoods. We urge you to pass the vitally important Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act of 2025 to begin funding and planning infrastructure improvements that will help wild animals, plants, and people reach their destinations and thrive.

*Julie Dunlap, PhD
Advocacy Chair
Audubon Society of Central Maryland
P.O. Box 660
Mt. Airy, MD 21771*

Goldfarb, B. 2023. *Crossings: How Road Ecology is Shaping the Future of Our Planet*. Norton.

MacArthur, R. and E. O. Wilson. 1967. *The Theory of Island Biogeography*. Princeton University Press.

Tewksbury, J.J.; Levey, D.J.; Haddad, N.M.; Sargent, S.; Orrock, J.L.; Weldon, A.; Danielson, B.J.; Brinkerhoff, J.; Damschen, E.I.; Townsend, P. (2002). Corridors affect plants, animals, and their interactions in fragmented landscapes. *PNAS*. **99** (20): 12923–12926. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC130561/>

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Testimony MD wildlife crossing bill - SB0635.pdf

Uploaded by: Karen Russell

Position: FAV

Testimony in support of SB0635
Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings
Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act

Submitted by:

Karen Russell, 510 E. Mountain Rd., Knoxville, MD 21758

Frederick County

301-401-2463

How do we feel when we hit a deer or crush a turtle trying to cross a road— vexed, regretful? These incidents occur where roads intersect wildlife movement corridors that existed before the road was built. In the case of turtles and other amphibians, their territories are fragmented by the road, which separates them from their breeding grounds. This year, Maryland secured a \$387,000 federal grant to identify priority locations for wildlife crossings over and under roads and create a statewide plan. Pennsylvania and Virginia have already received this grant.

But we need legislation to align state efforts with federal programs. The **Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act (SB0635)** establishes a state-level funding mechanism to match and supplement further federal investments. The Act formalizes cooperation between the State Highway Administration and the Dept of Natural Resources to lay the groundwork for designing and building wildlife crossings, mapping habitats, and reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions. The MD Connectivity Coalition supports this effort.

Maryland's population is expected to increase by 16%, or about 1 million people by 2050, resulting in a loss of about 6% of the total land area. Growing development pressure and increasing traffic creates an urgent need to design safer roads and address road-induced habitat fragmentation. Wildlife crossings are an effective, science-backed way to protect both people and animals. Well-placed wildlife crossings pay for themselves quickly through reduced collision costs. Please vote in favor of it.

P.S. I have researched and written a white paper about the need for wildlife corridors and crossings in Maryland that can be accessed [here](#).

MOS SB0635 Wildlife Crossings Feb 025.pdf

Uploaded by: Kurt Schwarz

Position: FAV



MARYLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

March 2, 2025

Bill: <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2025RS/bills/sb/sb0635F.pdf>

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Testimony on SB0635 Wildlife—Protections and Highway Crossings

Position: Favorable

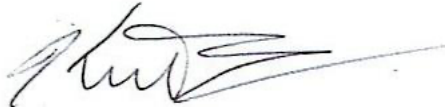
The Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) supports SB0635. SB0635 will establish a Maryland Connectivity Coalition, which will be tasked with fostering collaboration between State and Federal agencies, as well as non-governmental organization to combat habitat fragmentation and reduce collisions between vehicles and wildlife.

Highways and roads fragment habitat, so that wildlife often cannot cross between fragments, or if it does, does so at risk of death. We have all seen the numerous road-killed white-tailed deer, raccoons, red foxes, opossums, and cottontail rabbits that are frequently killed along our highways. I personally have seen at least four road-killed Barred Owls, and one Eastern Screech-Owl.

Habitat fragmentation is a serious threat to our declining Forest-Interior Dwelling bird Species (FIDS) such as Ovenbird, Kentucky Warbler, and Hooded Warbler. These species are very hesitant to cross a gap in forest, such as a road or highway would create. All three species are considered by Maryland as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).¹ A properly-made wildlife crossing would allow these species to move between forest fragments separated by a highway or road. Fragmentation also reduces the number of safe nesting areas, and increases exposure to predators.

The promotion of wildlife crossings, which will be the Maryland Connectivity Coalition's goal, will also create wildlife corridors, which are vital to establishing resilience to climate change. Populations with safe crossings can freely move to a new location, when old locations become unsuitable due to climate change.

Overall, North America has lost almost 30% of its birds since 1970². Habitat fragmentation is responsible for a large proportion of that loss. Wildlife crossings and corridors will help stem those losses. SB0635 will promote crossings and corridors, indeed, connectivity. For those reasons, we urge the Committee to issue a favorable report for SB0635.



Kurt R. Schwarz
Conservation Chair Emeritus
Maryland Ornithological Society
www.mdbirds.org

¹Maryland State Wildlife Action Plan, 2015, Appendix 1a. page 5,

https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Documents/SWAP/SWAP_AppendicesChapter1.pdf

² Rosenberg, Kenneth V. et al, Decline of the North American avifauna, Science, VOL 366, NO. 6451, 19 September 2019,

https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aaw1313?adobe_mc=MCORGID%3D242B6472541199F70A4C98A6%2540AdobeOrg%7CTS%3D1707754028

Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings - SB

Uploaded by: Lisa Radov

Position: FAV



MARYLAND VOTES FOR ANIMALS

PO Box 10411
BALTIMORE, MD 21209

March 4, 2025

To: Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
From: Lisa Radov, President and Chair, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc. Re:
Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings– SB 635 – Support

Chair Feldman, Vice - Chair Kagan, members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Lisa Radov. I am the President and Chairman of Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc. We champion humane legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. Speaking for Maryland Votes for Animals, our Board of Directors, and our members across the State of Maryland, I respectfully ask that the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to support Wildlife- Protections and Highway Crossings – SB 635.

SB 635 Establishes the Wildlife Connectivity Fund: Lays the groundwork for efforts to design and build wildlife crossings, map habitats, and reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions. The Fund can receive money from gifts, donations, grants, and, when available, state budget appropriations.

Leverages Federal Funding: Aligns state efforts with federal programs to secure funding and maximize state investment impact.

Promotes Sustainable Growth: Requires counties and municipalities to consider wildlife movement and habitat connectivity when developing comprehensive land use plans and provides them with up-to-date information on state connectivity plans.

Ensures Effective Outcomes: Requires performance metrics and measurable outcomes to evaluate the effectiveness of wildlife crossing infrastructure.

Enhances Public Awareness: Prioritizes education and outreach about wildlife collisions and the importance of habitat connectivity.

In Maryland, nearly 33,000 deer- vehicle collisions occur annually. Animals are moving and shifting their migration patterns as they adapt to climate change. Research and technology have made it possible to target the best places for wildlife crossings so that they can most effectively benefit wildlife and motorists. The Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act creates a mechanism to coordinate efforts between the Maryland State Highway Administration, the Department of Natural Resources, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders to protect Maryland's wildlife and drivers.

Maryland's wildlife and motorists are depending on us!

In closing, I would like to thank Senator Lewis Young for her sponsorship of SB 635 and ask the committee for a favorable report.

SB 635 - National Aquarium - Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Maggie Ostdahl

Position: FAV



Date: March 4, 2025

Bill: SB 635- Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings

Position: Support

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for SB 635. If enacted, this bill would create a Maryland Connectivity Coalition to identify and advance priority wildlife crossing projects that, among other benefits, will reduce habitat fragmentation for threatened and endangered species. The bill establishes a Wildlife Connectivity Fund to help leverage non-state support and to ensure future funding supports projects aligned with the goals of the bill.

Saving wildlife and habitats is one of the National Aquarium's three overarching conservation goals. Increasing habitat connectivity is one key solution to address the ongoing biodiversity crisis, especially when policies include special consideration for threatened and endangered species as this bill does. Roads and other paved surfaces create habitat fragmentation, hindering many animals' ability to feed and reproduce. Maryland's 69,000 miles of paved roads are no exception. Many species, including reptiles and amphibians, face the risk of mortality from road crossings during their overland migrations. Examples include wood turtles, semi-aquatic rainbow snakes, and the Eastern tiger salamander which migrates from woodlands in early spring and often travels over roads to reach breeding ponds. In addition to promoting sustainable improvements to Maryland's transportation infrastructure, this bill will ultimately assist species conservation efforts that help wildlife most in need.

This legislation also directs Maryland DNR to establish the Wildlife Connectivity Fund to invest in wildlife crossing infrastructure along with research needed to help determine the best locations for crossing locations. Such a fund will also allow the state to maximize investments in wildlife connectivity. Additionally, this fund would further advance the impacts of a recent grant SHA received to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions by accepting private donations to the Fund through the MVA Vehicle Registration Portal and directly through a Fund website. In doing so, this bill would leverage growing public support for protecting wildlife and create another opportunity for citizens to directly contribute to wildlife conservation efforts in Maryland.

Strategically addressing habitat connectivity throughout the state will benefit several threatened, endangered, and other imperiled species. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 635.**

Contact:

Ryan Fredriksson

Vice President, Government Affairs
410-385-8276
rfredriksson@aqua.org

Maggie Ost Dahl

Sr. Conservation Policy Manager
410-385-8275
mostdahl@aqua.org

SB635 Support_CC_02.28.25.pdf

Uploaded by: Mark Conway

Position: FAV



Saving the Chesapeake's Great Rivers and Special Places

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www.chesapeakeconservancy.org | 443.321.3610

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Date: February 28, 2025
Bill Number: **SB 635 - Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings**
Committee: Senate Education, Energy and the Environment
Position: Support

Chairman Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

Chesapeake Conservancy supports SB 635 - Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings, for the purpose of developing systems and processes to prevent or reduce collisions between humans and that of threatened species, endangered species, and species of the greatest conservation need.

This bill establishes a Maryland Connectivity Coalition that will help guide the targeted investments of the newly created "Wildlife Connectivity Fund" – under the auspices of the Maryland State Highway Administration. The coalition will develop performance metrics to evaluate the success of funded projects.

Projects will be focused along roadways where a high number of vehicle and wildlife collisions occur and may include things like the construction of exclusionary fencing, barriers, or other crossings to help connect wildlife with nourishment, potential mates, and suitable habitat. The fund may include money appropriated in the State budget, interest earnings from the fund, or other monies from other sources to benefit the fund.

This bill could be strengthened with greater clarity as to how charter counties shall consider wildlife movement and habitat connectivity, when adopting, amending, or executing local planning.

Overall, we greatly appreciate the desire to connect greater habitat and prevent further degradation of biodiversity within the state and Chesapeake Bay watershed.

We thank you for your service and for all that you do to increase the conservation and restoration of Maryland's natural and cultural resources.

For further information, please contact Mark Conway, Executive Vice President of External Affairs, at MConway@ChesapeakeConservancy.org or 443-321-3610.

We respectfully urge a favorable committee report.

Testimony of Dr Mark Southerland for HB 731 and SB

Uploaded by: Mark Southerland

Position: FAV



HB 731 and SB 635 Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act

TESTIMONY of DR. MARK SOUTHERLAND for VERNAL POOL PARTNERS -- Favorable

I received a Ph.D. and Smithsonian Fellowship in freshwater ecology and have consulted for federal, state, and local agencies on water resource issues for 30 years. I am the founder of **Vernal Pool Partners** and have served with the Maryland Academy of Sciences' Science Council, Maryland Water Monitoring Council, Howard County Environmental Sustainability Board, Howard County Conservancy, Patapsco Heritage Greenway, and Safe Skies Maryland.

This bill will:

- Promote collaboration between the State Highway Administration and Department of Natural Resources to identify and advance needed wildlife crossing projects
- Establish a Wildlife Connectivity Fund and leverage federal funding
- Promote sustainable growth in comprehensive land use plans
- Ensure effective outcomes through performance metrics and measurable outcomes
- Enhance public awareness of wildlife collisions and the need for habitat connectivity

Vernal pools are especially valuable local ecosystems that provide stepping stones for mammals, bird, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates across urban, suburban, rural, and wildland areas. Breeding amphibians, such as wood frogs and mole salamanders (including the endangered tiger salamander), can only exist where they can migrate from their upland foraging habitats to breeding pools each year. Mortality on roads during breeding migrations can be catastrophic to these amphibian populations.

I urge you to pass the Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act to help reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and support habitat connectivity for wildlife across the state.

SB635_MDSierraClub_fav_EEE_04Mar_2025.pdf

Uploaded by: Michael Wilpers

Position: FAV



P.O. Box 278
Riverdale, MD 20738

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB 635 Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings
Position: Support
Hearing Date: March 4, 2025

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports SB 635, as it lays the groundwork for long-term efforts to improve wildlife passage and protect rare, threatened, and endangered animals from becoming roadkill.

In Maryland, five of our 18 turtle species suffer significant mortality due to vehicle strikes, including the diamond-backed terrapin, the state reptile and mascot of the University of Maryland College Park. Vehicle collisions significantly impact four other species: the wood turtle, the northern map turtle, the painted turtle, and the eastern box turtle.¹

All four of the bill's main provisions – formalizing the State's wildlife corridors coalition, establishing a fund for related income, prioritizing public education, and guiding counties and municipalities on wildlife corridors in their planning – include provisions that address the need to protect our endangered turtles and amphibians by providing passageways under roads.

With this bill, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the State Highway Administration (SHA) will cooperate with legislators and outside specialists in studying, planning, and educating the public for additional and improved roadway culverts. The long-term effect will be to allow our wildlife to conduct their natural movements, for foraging and reproduction, with less risk of mortality from vehicle traffic.

Maryland's reptiles and amphibians are especially vulnerable to vehicle collisions because they are slow-moving. Drivers instinctively stop or swerve to avoid hitting these animals. The results range from fender-benders to multi-car collisions. In 2023, for example, a turtle crossing in Florida caused a seven-car accident.²

Road mortality is one of the greatest contributors to declines in freshwater turtles in North

¹ Cunningham, H.R., and N.H. Nazdrowicz, eds., *The Maryland Amphibian and Reptile Atlas* (Johns Hopkins Press, 2018). <https://news.maryland.gov/dnr/2019/04/30/maryland-amphibian-and-reptile-atlas-now-available/>

² [Motor Vehicle Accidents Involving Turtles \(lakejacksonturtles.org\)](https://www.lakejacksonturtles.org/); <https://www.nj.com/news/2022/06/slow-moving-turtle-sparks-3-car-accident-on-nj-road.html>; <https://www.wtsp.com/article/news/regional/florida/florida-driver-stops-for-turtle-car-crash/67-25d3f9ee-d16b-4445-9b1b-2a04e795a550>.

America.³ In a Maine study, more than 50 percent of all roadkill animals were turtles, frogs, and salamanders.⁴ Overall, turtle populations in the eastern U.S. have suffered a 10 to 20 percent loss from road kills alone.⁵ Females are especially vulnerable because they travel further than males and move more slowly while carrying 8-10 eggs. Many turtles don't reach reproductive age until about 15 years old, so losing one mature female is a major blow to the future population.

Fortunately, SHA has already demonstrated a commendable ability to create wildlife passageways under state roads. In 2012, the SHA received a federal DOT Environmental Toolkit Award for an "Exemplary Ecosystems Initiative," citing innovative culverts under the Intercounty Connector (ICC).⁶ These culverts are frequently utilized by turtles, along with deer, raccoons, opossums, squirrels, and foxes (the last of which help control our rodent populations). The ICC's fencing directs wildlife to these culverts and limits their access to the roadway. Because they usually follow waterways, turtles and salamanders often need only adjustments to existing pipes and culverts that already channel streams under roadways.

In addition to protecting Maryland's turtles from vehicle traffic, the improved stream culverts will also help our brook trout. Although they aren't targeted in the legislation, brook trout are treasured by Marylanders who enjoy fishing and are a vulnerable/watchlist species in the state.⁷ In the course of foraging and reproducing, they need to swim both upstream and downstream in creeks channeled under roadways, where older culverts often block upstream passage.⁸

The brook trout's range overlaps with that of the wood turtle, an imperiled state-rare species in Maryland, so protecting one will protect the other. A recent study in New York and Connecticut showed that wood turtles "commonly come in close proximity to the roads intersecting and bordering a stream corridor." The study recommends that "measures that facilitate safe passage beneath roads should be implemented whenever roads are present near occupied wood turtle habitat."⁹

For all these reasons, the Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB 1129 and encourages a favorable report.

³ Hagani, J.S., et al., "Movement Ecology of the Imperiled Wood Turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*) in a Lower Hudson River Watershed," *Chelonian Conservation and Biology*, 2021, 20(2). <https://bioone.org/journals/chelonian-conservation-and-biology/volume-20/issue-2/CCB-1490.1/Movement-Ecology-of-the-Imperiled-Wood-Turtle-Glyptemys-insculpta-in/10.2744/CCB-1490.1.short>

⁴ https://maineaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/From-Maine-Audubon.MOHF_finalreport_TURTLES2021_f.pdf

⁵ "Turtles Decline Due to Roadkill," ABC News, August 9, 2001.

<https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/story?id=98351&page=1#:~:text=He%20found%20that%20turtle%20populations%20in%20the%20Northeast%2C.20%20percent%20mortality%20rates%20due%20to%20traffic%20encounters>

⁶ https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/pubs_resources_tools/resources/eei_awards/2012md_1.aspx

⁷ Maryland Wildlife and Heritage Service, "List of Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Animals of Maryland," November 2023 https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Documents/rte_Animal_List.pdf

⁸ Poplar-Jeffers, I.O., et al, "Culvert Replacement and Stream Habitat Restoration: Implications from Brook Trout Management in an Appalachian Watershed," *Restoration Ecology*, 2009. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1526-100X.2008.00396.x>; [A Comparison of Brook Trout Passage at Road Culverts to Broad-scale Assessment Criteria in a Pennsylvania Headwater Stream - Rogers - 2021 - North American Journal of Fisheries Management - Wiley Online Library](#)

⁹ Hagani, J.S., et al., *op. cit.*

Michael Wilpers
Natural Places Committee
wilpersm@gmail.com

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

Testimony in Support of SB0635 The Maryland Connec

Uploaded by: Misty boos

Position: FAV



Testimony in Support of SB0635 – The Maryland Connectivity and Crossings Act Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee 3/4/2025

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of 30 organizations in strong support of [SB0635](#), the Maryland Connectivity and Crossings Act. This legislation represents a critical step forward in addressing the mounting challenges of wildlife-vehicle collisions, habitat fragmentation, and transportation safety.

Enhancing Public Safety and Reducing Costs

Each year, Maryland experiences nearly [33,000 reported deer-vehicle collisions](#), resulting in substantial economic and human costs. Between 2012 and 2021, [14 Marylanders lost their lives](#) due to wildlife-related crashes, and the financial burden of these incidents exceeds [\\$100 million annually](#). Insurance companies have incurred more than [\\$500 million in losses](#) since 2021 from such collisions, and a [recently released study](#) on the effects of wild animal collisions on premium increases for insurance shows the ways in which those losses can be passed on to Maryland drivers. Proactively investing in wildlife crossings will reduce accidents, protect motorists, and ease the financial burden on taxpayers and insurers.

Demonstrated Success of Wildlife Crossings

The effectiveness of wildlife crossings is well-documented. In Virginia, the installation of fencing and culverts resulted in a [92% reduction in deer-vehicle collisions](#) at select sites, generating [\\$2.3 million in savings per site](#) within just two years. Similar success stories across the country underscore the cost-effectiveness of these measures. By integrating performance metrics and measurable outcomes into [SB0635](#), we can ensure that Maryland's wildlife crossings are built efficiently and deliver the intended results.

Laying the Groundwork for Future Investment

The passage of this bill is critical to ensuring Maryland is prepared to address wildlife-vehicle collisions and habitat connectivity in a strategic, coordinated way. By establishing the Wildlife Connectivity Fund, [SB0635](#) creates a dedicated mechanism for supporting wildlife-friendly infrastructure, allowing the state to proactively invest in solutions rather than reacting to costly collisions and habitat fragmentation. While this bill does not allocate any funding directly, the fund provides the opportunity to gather private donations. It also lays the groundwork to manage

future state investment, public/private partnership funding, and federal funding to advance priority projects as resources become available.

Additionally, this bill formalizes collaboration between state agencies, local governments, and conservation experts, ensuring that Maryland has a clear roadmap for identifying and implementing effective wildlife crossings. With growing development pressures and increasing road expansion, [SB0635](#) lays the foundation for long-term, cost-effective infrastructure solutions that enhance both public safety and ecological connectivity.

Advancing Ecological Connectivity and Sustainable Development

Wildlife habitat fragmentation is a growing concern as Maryland's population expands and pressures from land development increase. Studies have shown that species such as the wood turtle—a Species of Greatest Conservation Need—are facing [severe declines due to road mortality](#). This bill will help counteract these threats by requiring counties and municipalities to incorporate wildlife movement and connectivity considerations into their comprehensive land use planning efforts. Providing local governments with up-to-date data and best practices will lead to smarter, more sustainable development decisions that balance growth with conservation.

The Maryland Connectivity and Crossings Act is a practical, science-backed solution to a pressing public safety and conservation issue. By passing this legislation, Maryland will protect motorists, reduce economic losses, conserve imperiled wildlife, and secure both private and federal funding that will yield long-term benefits for our communities and natural heritage. I urge you to support [SB0635](#).

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Misty Boos
U.S. Conservation Policy Manager
434-906-9861
www.wildlandsnetwork.org

Organizations Signed on in support of the Maryland Connectivity and Crossings Act

American Rivers
Association of Forest Industries, Inc.
Audubon Mid-Atlantic
Audubon Society of Central Maryland
Baltimore Green Space
Calico Fields Environmental Education
Catoctin Land Trust
Center for Large Landscape Conservation
Climate Change Working Group of
Frederick County
Climate Communications Coalition

Eastern Shore Land Conservancy
Endangered Species Coalition
Forever Maryland
Harford Land Trust
Hunters of Maryland, LLC
Indivisible HoCoMD
Maryland Ornithological Society
Maryland State Grange
Maryland Votes for Animals
National Aquarium
National Parks Conservation Association

National Wildlife Federation
Potomac Conservancy
Queen Anne's Conservation Association
Scenic Rivers Land Trust
Sierra Club

Susquehannock Wildlife Society
Vernal Pool Partners
Wild Potomac
Wildlands Network

Wildlife Crossings legislation testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Natalie Dickter

Position: FAV

February 28, 2025

Re: SB0635—Wildlife Protections and Highway Crossings

Testimony of Natalie Dickter
Silver Spring, Maryland

Dear Senator Lewis Young,

I hereby submit my written testimony IN FAVOR OF legislation supporting Wildlife Protections and Highway Crossings.

After watching an interview of Ben Goldfarb, author of *Crossings: How Road Ecology Is Shaping the Future of Our Planet*, in which Mr. Goldfarb mentioned that “Maryland is doing great things” in this area, I became interested in helping to get this legislation passed.

I am a Certified Maryland Master Naturalist and also hold a Certificate of Accomplishment in Natural History Field Studies. My coursework leading to these certifications was sponsored by Nature Forward (formerly named Audubon Naturalist Society), located in Chevy Chase, MD. I am a long-time volunteer at Nature Forward, and since 2019 I am a volunteer for the National Park Service, leading tours of Theodore Roosevelt Island in Washington, DC.

As Mr. Goldfarb discusses in his book:

“While roads are so ubiquitous they're practically invisible to us, wild animals experience them as entirely alien forces of death and disruption. A million animals are killed by cars each day in the US alone, but ... the harms of highways extend far beyond roadkill. Creatures are losing their ability to migrate in search of food and mates.”

In Maryland and in other states across the country, the results of responsible road ecology have already produced optimistic results for animals—and for people injured or killed when they hit a large animal on a highway.

I thank you for introducing this bill, and I hope to see its passage in the 2025 General Assembly legislative session.

Thank you,
Natalie Dickter

SB 635_MAMIC_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Sarah Joan Smith

Position: FAV

Bryson F. Popham, P.A.

Bryson F. Popham, Esq.

191 Main Street
Suite 310
Annapolis, MD 21401
www.papalaw.com

410-268-6871 (Telephone)
443-458-0444 (Facsimile)

February 17, 2025

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

RE: Senate Bill 635 Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings – FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Committee,

I'm writing today on behalf of the Maryland Association of Mutual Insurance Companies (MAMIC) in support of Senate Bill 635.

MAMIC is comprised of 12 mutual insurance companies that are headquartered in Maryland and neighboring states. Approximately one-half of its members are domiciled in Maryland, and are key contributors and employers in our local communities. Together, MAMIC members offer a wide variety of insurance products and services and provide coverage for thousands of Maryland citizens.

MAMIC members who offer automobile insurance in the State often adjudicate claims resulting from collisions with wild animals. The considerable majority of such collisions involve deer; in fact, a recent study by the Maryland Insurance Administration noted that such collisions are both common and costly, with over 30,000 wildlife collisions each year.

MAMIC members believe that the time has come to examine this phenomenon more closely, and that such examination should include State and federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations and other stakeholders, all as set forth in Senate Bill 635.

The stakes are high, both in reducing future losses from wildlife collisions and enhancing traffic safety in areas of the State where such collisions are likely to occur. For these reasons, we respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 635.

Very truly yours,



Bryson Popham

SB635_FAV_Humane World.pdf

Uploaded by: Stacey Volodin

Position: FAV



1255 23rd St. NW, Suite 450
Washington DC, 20037
202-452-1100
humaneworld.org

Formerly called the Humane
Society of the United States and
Humane Society International

March 4, 2025

**Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
SB 635 Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings
FAVORABLE**

On behalf of our Maryland members and supporters, Humane World for Animals offers its enthusiastic support for SB 635 to establish and administer a program for the implementation of wildlife crossings of highways in our state.

Habitat loss and fragmentation pose an immediate and long-term threat to countless species. The U.S. human population is expected to grow to nearly 400 million by 2050, meaning more development, more deforestation and fewer wild and open spaces. Even lands remaining undeveloped will become increasingly fragmented by infrastructure developments. Roads, in particular, are a major mortality factor for wildlife populations residing in fragmented habitat.¹ Diminished habitats can also reduce food availability and increase conflicts with humans, pets and livestock.²

Developing safe wildlife road crossings as well as restoring and conserving critical habitat and wildlife corridors are essential to ensure wildlife are protected from increased human development and climate change. Road development and vehicle collisions with wildlife can be quite damaging to populations, especially those that are already small and fragile.³

While most (87%) animal-vehicle collisions in the United States involve deer, many other species are struck on roadways.⁴ Vehicle strikes are expensive to society. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation (2008), the estimated average cost of a single animal-vehicle collision is \$6,126 per incident; that includes property damage, human injuries, or, more rarely, fatalities.⁵ The cost in today's dollars is likely much higher. For the years 2001-2002, an estimated 26,647 injuries occurred as a result of animal-vehicle collisions.⁶ But those are not the only costs. Other losses include:

- The suffering and distress of injured animals
- The costs to rehabilitate animals, including X-rays and veterinary care by nonprofit organizations
- The loss of expenditures involved in conservation efforts for threatened or endangered species by governments and organizations
- The costs to municipalities of cleanup and disposal of tens of thousands of animal carcasses

Formerly called the Humane
Society of the United States and
Humane Society International

- The loss to businesses from loss of transportation, lodging and meal costs that would have been spent by wildlife recreationists of all types
- The emotional distress of people involved in accidents
- The cultural losses to Native Americans and groups such as wildlife watchers and advocates⁷

The mitigated costs from reduced vehicle collisions and the subsequent reduction in injury to humans and wildlife should also be a factor when cost is considered. Wildlife crossing structures, such as road overpasses and underpasses, including drainage culverts, can reduce the injury and death of wildlife as well as human drivers and vehicle passengers.⁸ Additionally, while highway overpasses and underpasses can be expensive, building their creation into the design of new roads can save significant future costs. Using existing structures, such as culverts and tunnels, can reduce costs to the development of safe passages.⁹

For the reasons stated above, we urge a favorable vote on SB 635 and efforts to research and develop critical wildlife crossings that could save countless lives in Maryland.

Stacey Volodin
Maryland State Director
svolodin@humanesociety.org

¹ Maehr, D. S., M. J. Kelly, C. Bolgiano, T. Lester, and H. McGinnis. 2003. Eastern cougar recovery is linked to the Florida panther: Cardoza and Langlois revisited. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 31:849-853.

² Vickers, T. W., J. N. Sanchez, C. K. Johnson, S. A. Morrison, R. Botta, T. Smith, B. S. Cohen, P. R. Huber, H. B. Ernest, and W. M. Boyce. 2015. Survival and mortality of pumas (puma concolor) in a fragmented, urbanizing landscape. *PLOS One* 10.

³ Negri, S., and H. B. Quigley. 2010. Cougar Conservation. Pages 221-234 in M. C. Hornocker and S. Negri, editors. *Cougar: Ecology and Conservation*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.

⁴ U.S. Department of Transportation. 2008. *Wildlife-Vehicle Reduction Study: Report to Congress*. <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/08034/08034.pdf>.

⁵ U.S. Department of Transportation. 2008.

⁶ U.S. Department of Transportation. 2008. ⁷ U.S. Department of Transportation. 2008.

⁸ Clevenger, A. P., B. Chruszcz, and K. Gunson. 2001. Drainage culverts as habitat linkages and factors affecting passage by mammals. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 38:1340-1349; Ng, S. J., J. W. Dole, R. M. Sauvajot, S. P. D. Riley, and T. J. Valone. 2004. Use of highway undercrossings by wildlife in southern California. *Biological Conservation* 115:499-507.

⁹ See e.g., Ng, S. J., J. W. Dole, R. M. Sauvajot, S. P. D. Riley, and T. J. Valone. 2004. Use of highway undercrossings by wildlife in southern California. *Biological Conservation* 115:499-507.

SB0635_DNR_SWA_EEE_3-4-25 revised.pdf

Uploaded by: Emily Wilson

Position: FWA



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

March 4, 2025

BILL NUMBER: **Senate Bill 635 - First Reader**

SHORT TITLE: **Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings**

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

This bill would formalize work being coordinated under what's been known as a wildlife crossing coalition. As currently written the bill requires the Coalition to meet quarterly regarding the various tasks outlined in the bill. Given the current fiscal uncertainty the Department would respectfully request consideration be given to language that would account for this so that the Coalition would meet and implement actions when practicable, provided there is funding to support such actions. The Department is supportive and appreciative of the sponsors' amendments that name the Maryland Department of Transportation as Chair of the Maryland Connectivity Coalition established in this bill, as well as language that allows cancellation of meetings should there be no agenda to discuss.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Wildlife collisions with automobiles - particularly deer collisions - can have serious consequences for Maryland drivers and passengers. This bill proposes to use engineering solutions to solve these issues. It also seeks to provide funding for road crossing structures for rare animal species.

BILL EXPLANATION

This bill prescribes numerous activities related to investigating and addressing places where there is contact between Wildlife and State highways. It establishes a fund for this work. It establishes and prescribes the conduct of a committee to oversee this work and a fund source. It establishes a requirement that highway interaction with Wildlife be incorporated into county comprehensive plans.

Contact: Emily Wilson, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services (Acting)
emilyh.wilson@maryland.gov ♦ 410-260-8426 (office) ♦ 443-223-1176 (cell)

SB0635 - SHA - LOSwA - Wildlife - Protections and

Uploaded by: Patricia Westervelt

Position: FWA

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

The Honorable Brian Feldman
Page Two

- 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,

April King
Acting Director
Office of Government Affairs
Maryland State Highway Administration
410-210-5780

Matthew Mickler
Director
Office of Government Affairs
Maryland Department of Transportation
410-865-1090

Amendment for SB0635 Wildlife Highway Crossings.pd

Uploaded by: Senator Karen Lewis Young

Position: FWA



SB0635/243427/1

AMENDMENTS
PREPARED
BY THE
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE
SERVICES

20 FEB 25
13:04:09

BY: Senator Lewis Young
(To be offered in the Education, Energy, and the Environment
Committee)

AMENDMENT TO SENATE BILL 635

(First Reading File Bill)

On page 4, in line 5, after “(4)” insert “THE STATE HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATOR SHALL SERVE AS CHAIR OF THE COALITION.”

(5)”;

and in line 13, strike “(5)” and substitute “(6)”.

On page 5, in lines 1, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, and 19, strike “(6)”, “(7)”, “(I)”, “(II)”, “(III)”, “(IV)”, “(V)”, “(8)”, and “(9)”, respectively, and substitute “(7)”, “(8)”, “1.”, “2.”, “3.”, “4.”, “5.”, “(9)”, and “(10)”, respectively; in line 6, strike “THE” and substitute “(I)

EXCEPT AS PROVIDED IN SUBPARAGRAPH (II) OF THIS PARAGRAPH, THE”;
and after line 15, insert:

“(II) THE COALITION MAY CANCEL A MEETING FOR LACK OF AN AGENDA.”

Cover Letter for SB0635.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Senator Karen Lewis Young

Position: FWA



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

HB 0731 FIN 0206.pdf

Uploaded by: Senator Karen Lewis Young

Position: FWA

Department of Legislative Services
2025 Session
Agency Explanation of Impact

Bill number: HB0731

Cross file: SB0635

Bill title: Wildlife - Protections and Highway Crossings

Agency: Maryland Department of Transportation - (tra / 373)

Prepared by: David A. Sohns

Title: Sr. Financial Analyst

Phone number:

Email address: dsohns@mdot.maryland.gov

Date: February 6, 2025

To assist our department in preparing a fiscal and policy note for this proposed legislation, please provide detailed responses to the questions below.

If you have additional information that cannot be included in either this Word document or the provided Excel file, please send that information **in a separate email** to fnotes@mlis.state.md.us **with the bill number included in the document and the email subject line.**

1. Will this legislation have a fiscal and/or operational impact on your agency?

YES x_____ NO _____

If yes, please proceed to question #2 on page 2.

If no, please briefly indicate **why** below and then proceed to question #6 on page 4.

2. General Operational/Fiscal Impact on Your Agency – Please describe the operational and/or fiscal impact of the proposed legislation on your agency.

This proposal makes numerous changes to policies and procedures surrounding wildlife safety on Maryland roadways, including, among other things, establishing the Maryland Connectivity Coalition. The proposal specifies numerous coalition participants, including the State Highway Administration (SHA). While the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) is not specified as a required participant, it is possible that the MVA may be selected to participate by the SHA Administrator. The MVA could participate in this effort, if requested, using existing resources.

The proposal also establishes a Wildlife Connectivity Fund (WCF) as a special, non-lapsing fund, administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), in consultation with SHA, for the purpose of protecting species whose habitat or movement intersect with a state highway. This fund consists of money appropriated in the State budget, interest earnings, and any other money from any source accepted for the benefit of the fund.

SHA

HB0731/SB0635 will result in increased coordination and reporting by SHA but should not be too significant. The estimated fiscal impact *could* be \$50,000 to \$100,000 for staff time devoted to the additional leadership role in the ‘Coalition’, coordination with DNR, and annual reporting requirements.

According to the bill language, these costs would be covered by the Wildlife Connectivity Fund. Among other things, the fund may be used to “cover the costs of relevant administration and personnel expenses, including 1) cost recovery, 2) GIS Data, and 3) any other related administrative costs. The fund may also “cover the costs of asset management for wildlife crossing infrastructure, including planning, inventory, condition information and life cycle analysis.”

MVA

The proposal does not specify the source of funds; however, it requires the DNR to “work with the MVA to provide the option, appearing on the vehicle registration portal, to donate to the fund,” if feasible. To the extent that the DNR may pursue this option, the MVA would adjust current systems to allow customers to donate to the WCF when completing a registration transaction. This would require the MVA to (1) change internal and external systems to allow customers to donate to WCF; and (2) collect donations and disperse the funds to the DNR. The setup would mirror existing processes, which allow customers to donate to several optional programs including *Tree-Mendous* through the DNR, and the Traumatic Brain Injury Fund (*See #6 below) when renewing a registration. Required changes could be accomplished with existing resources.

Other changes in the proposal, including alternations to roadway procedures for wildlife protection, have no impact on MVA revenues or expenditures.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2025

3. Impact on Revenues – Please estimate any increase or decrease in revenues (general, special, federal, or other funds) in each of the next five fiscal years. Enter the estimated amounts in the *Revenues* worksheet in the provided Excel file and describe in the space below.

- Please be aware of delayed effective dates or other factors that may cause revenue increases/decreases to begin in later years.
- Please explain the cause(s) of the revenue increase(s)/decrease(s), any assumptions and/or calculations used, and any variations if the revenue impact(s) are not constant.
- If federal funds are affected, please describe how (*e.g.*, loss of funds for noncompliance, availability of new funds, etc.)

No foreseeable impact on revenues.

4. Impact on Expenditures – Please estimate the increase or decrease in expenditures in each of the next five fiscal years using the *Expenditures* worksheet in the provided Excel file and describe in the space below.

- Please be aware of delayed effective dates or other factors that may cause expenditure increases/decreases to begin in later years.
- Please explain the need for the number and type of personnel (both permanent and contractual), including (1) what specific provision(s) of the bill necessitate additional staff; (2) what the duties of each type of employee will be; and (3) why existing personnel cannot absorb the additional work.
- Please describe the items included under “Other Operating Expenses” and explain any assumptions or calculations used in your estimates.
- Please specify the fund type (general, federal, special, or other) or combination of fund types of the expenditure increases and/or decreases.

See # 2 above.

5. Anticipated in Proposed Operating/Capital Budget? – Have funds been included in your agency’s proposed operating or capital budget in anticipation of this legislation? Or has your agency submitted a request for funding in a supplemental budget? If so, please indicate specific amount(s) budgeted and budget code(s).

No

6. Other Information – Please provide any other information that may be helpful in determining the fiscal effect of this legislation, even if the bill does not directly affect your agency.

The following is provided to give a sense of donations generated for similar funds through MVA’s vehicle registration portal

*Revenue for the *Tree-Mendous* Maryland Program and the Traumatic Brain Injury Fund in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 were as follows:

| | Number of Transactions with Donations | Total Revenue Generated FY24 |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Tree-Mendous Maryland | 9,757 | \$137,331.92 |
| Traumatic Brain Injury Fund | 4,235 | \$63,844.59 |

7. Effect on Local Governments – Will local government operations or finances (revenues or expenditures) be affected by this legislation? If yes, please describe how.

There is an effect on local jurisdictions. The fiscal impacts are indeterminate.

The legislation provides matching grants from the WCF to counties and municipalities for projects related to the purpose of the fund.

The Department of Planning is charged with coordinating with DNR and SHA “to provide each charter county with updated information on habitat connectivity concerns and current and planned wildlife crossings.”

Local jurisdictions “shall consider wildlife movement and habitat connectivity when enacting, adopting, amending, or executing a plan in according with 3-101 (Maryland Land Use Code). “

8. Effect on Small Businesses – Will existing small businesses be affected (either positively or negatively) by this legislation and/or will the legislation encourage or discourage new small business opportunities? If so, please describe.

State law defines a small business as a corporation, partnership, sole proprietorship, or other business entity, including affiliates that: (1) is independently owned and operated; (2) is not dominant in its field; and (3) employs 50 or fewer full-time employees.

Indeterminate.