



HB780 – Urban State Highways – Speed Limits - Exceptions

Environment & Transportation Committee

February 11, 2025

Position: Favorable

Greetings Chair and Members of the Committee,

Our mission is to promote bicycling, increase safety, improve conditions, and provide a voice for bicyclists in Maryland. We partner with advocacy organizations to promote vulnerable road user safety legislation on the state and county level and work with government agencies, including police departments, to develop policy and awareness campaigns that protect the rights and well-being of bicyclists and pedestrians in Maryland.

We the undersigned represent multiple community-based organizations advocating for safe biking, walking and active transportation, submit this testimony on behalf of tens of thousands of members across the State of Maryland.

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we ask for your favorable support of SB424, which would authorize the State Highway Administration to decrease the maximum speed limit by 5 miles per hour on urban state highways without an engineering and traffic investigation.

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, HB780 would directly address vehicle speed, a factor that is known to make our streets more dangerous for vulnerable road users.

Reduction in posted speed limits is part of the Context Driven toolkit that is applied by the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA). The SHA positions limit reduction as a safety countermeasure in urban and suburban contexts, "as part

of the proactive treatments aimed at increasing safety for vulnerable road users.” The SHA’s Context Driven Toolkit states, “in denser context areas, a reduction in the posted speed limit may have a significant impact on safety for more vulnerable users, including pedestrians and bicyclists. Higher operating speeds reduce a driver’s ability to react when they encounter these users in the road, and result in higher severity outcomes when collisions occur.” However, the requirement to conduct both an engineering and traffic investigation, on a road by-road basis, is onerous. It is expensive, time-consuming, and a deterrent to taking steps we know we must take. Let us recognize that MDOT’s work on Complete Streets, Context Driven, and Vision Zero strategies fully justifies allowing the SHA discretion in speed-limit reduction, as would be afforded by SB424.

The General Assembly has an opportunity to boost Maryland road safety by enacting HB780. We request that the committee support the passage of HB780.

Baltimore Bicycling Club (BBC)

Bicycle Advocates for Annapolis & Anne Arundel County (BikeAAA)

Bike Maryland

Bikemore

Frederick Bicycle Coalition

Maryland Eastern Shore Trail Network

Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA)