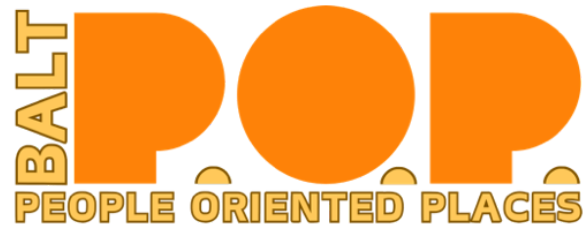


Bill: HB0141

Bill Title: Task Force on Loneliness and Isolation

Position: **Favorable**



Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee,

As a group which advocates for people-oriented places and human-scale development, we are happy to see HB0141 being submitted for consideration.

We believe that a large and underappreciated driver of the loneliness epidemic is the transportation and land use practices we (as both a state and a country) have pursued since the end of World War II. The transportation system we have built is overwhelmingly automobile-centric and the communities we have built are overwhelmingly low-density (and also automobile-centric). As a result, the built environment that most Marylanders find themselves living in is actively hostile to the sort of spontaneous interactions that humans enjoyed for all of history (prior to the end of World War II).

Given this, we are thrilled to see this bill call for the following two members to serve on the task force:

- One representative of an organization in the State that is working on policies to improve planning and zoning laws to create an inclusive society and improve access to transit-oriented development in the State
- One representative of an organization in the State that is working to improve and create more walkable and accessible main streets in towns and municipalities in the State

The perspectives brought to the task force by such individuals will prove invaluable.

Our communities are populated with places to gather with others - such as restaurants, bars, coffee shops, libraries, senior centers, recreation centers, parks, etc. That remains mostly the case now as it did 100 years prior (although the increasing prevalence of drive-throughs and home delivery services are eroding that equivalence). However, we tend to spend the majority of our lives either someplace else other than those places (e.g., in our single-family detached homes) or traveling to/from those places (e.g., in our single-occupancy automobiles). And it is during that majority of our waking lives where our modern development pattern has funneled us into lives of isolation.

While it would appear that automobile-**accessibility** is associated with increased levels of happiness, automobile-**dependence** is not. A recent study concluded that “using a car for over

50% of out-of-home activities lowers life satisfaction”. [1] And yet, for most Marylanders, the vast majority of the places we offer for them to live their lives are automobile-centric.

The problem is that our current automobile-centric and low-density transportation and land use patterns have become so pervasive, so much the default, that we can't even see it being part of the issue. Fortunately, once you do see it, you can't unsee it.

We hope the committee finds these points helpful and convincing and we urge its members to **vote in favor of HB0141**. Thank you for your efforts and the opportunity for us to testify on this legislation.

[BaltPOP - Baltimoreans for People-Oriented Places](#)

References:

[1] Saadaoui, R. et al. (2024, November 19). "Does Car Dependence Make People Unsatisfied With Life? Evidence From a U.S. National Survey." *Travel Behaviour and Society*.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2214367X24002175>