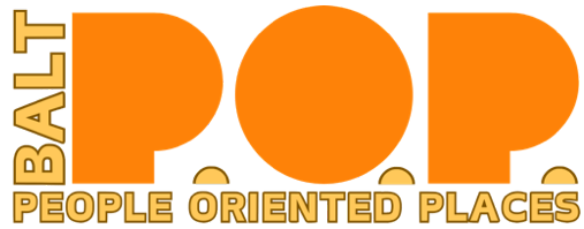


Bill: SB0424

Bill Title: Urban State Highways - Speed Limits - Exceptions

Position: **Favorable**



Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

As a group which advocates for a built environment which is safe and convenient for all people, whether they are moving through that environment on foot, on a bicycle, in a wheelchair, via public transit, or in an automobile, we support SB0424.

Maryland's roadways are not safe, especially for vulnerable road users (VRUs). Despite the Vision Zero efforts of the past several years, those roadways have actually gotten less safe - for everyone.

Specific to the Baltimore region, the Baltimore Regional Transportation Board (BRTB), on an annual basis, tracks five performance/safety measures to carry out the Federal Highway Administration's Highway Safety Improvement Program. The last of those five measures is "Number of Non-motorized Fatalities & Serious Injuries". The numbers for this measure are abysmal.

The 2023 number for this measure was **410**, which is a **41% increase** over the 2005-2009 baseline number of **290**. The Maryland Department of Transportation's (MDOT's) current target for this measure is **294 by 2030**. [1] In terms of VRU deaths and serious injuries, MDOT is hoping to basically get us back to where we were 20 years ago. That's not progress - that's standing still.

But, breaking the horrible upward trendline of VRU deaths and serious injuries we are suffering through is a critical first step. Some of the recent actions MDOT has taken in this space, including their revamped Complete Streets policy and quick build initiatives, are very encouraging. But, they need more tools made available to them. The capability that will be afforded to them by this bill is one such tool.

This bill is very straightforward. It will allow the State Highway Administration (SHA) to lower the speed limit on a road in an urban area by 5 mph - without the need to conduct an expensive traffic study. We can't think of a realistic scenario where simply giving the SHA this ability would be a bad idea. Even if the SHA only made use of this capability to reduce the speed limit on a road on only a test basis, it would be a power well worth granting.

While 5 mph may not seem like much, it can have a very significant impact on VRUs. The risk of death and serious injury to a pedestrian struck by a moving vehicle increases in a very clear fashion as the speed of that vehicle rises.

...the average risk of **severe injury** for a pedestrian struck by a vehicle reaches 10% at an impact speed of 16 mph, 25% at 23 mph, **50% at 31 mph, 75% at 39 mph**, and 90% at 46 mph.

The average risk of **death** for a pedestrian reaches 10% at an impact speed of 23 mph, 25% at 32 mph, **50% at 42 mph, 75% at 50 mph**, and 90% at 58 mph.[2]

**The risk of severe injury increases by 50% in the 8 mph difference between 31 mph and 39 mph. The risk of death increases by 50% in the 8 mph difference between 42 mph and 50 mph.**

A 5 mph reduction in speeds is very consequential and stands to significantly reduce the risk of death and severe injury for pedestrians (and, by extension, people traveling by wheelchair or bicycle).

We hope the committee finds these points helpful and convincing and we urge its members to **vote in favor of SB0424**. Thank you for your efforts and the opportunity for us to testify on this legislation.

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

References:

[1] "RESOLUTION #25-19 - ADOPTING HIGHWAY SAFETY TARGETS FOR THE BALTIMORE REGION". BRTB. January 2025.

<https://baltometro.org/sites/default/files/BRTBRes25-19.pdf>

[2] Tefft, B.C. "Impact Speed and a Pedestrian's Risk of Severe Injury or Death". AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. September 2011.

<https://aaaafoundation.org/impact-speed-pedestrians-risk-severe-injury-death/>

Notes to myself

<https://www.criminaldefenselawyer.com/resources/criminal-defense/state-felony-laws/maryland-felony-class.htm>

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