
March 6, 2026

The Honorable Kriselda Valderrama
Chair, Economic Matters Committee
230 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter of Support with Amendment – House Bill 1296 – Preliminary Subdivision and Site Plans – Safe School Route Reports – Requirement

Dear Chair Valderrama and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) supports House Bill 1296 with a proposed amendment for the Committee's consideration.

HB 1296 requires developers of proposed residential projects that include at least five new homes within walking distance of a public school to submit a Safe School Route Report. This report must analyze pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and propose safety improvements. Additionally, the bill prohibits local jurisdictions from approving development plans until a report is approved and authorizes jurisdictions to impose a surety or permit hold until the developer completes the identified improvements.

The State Highway Administration (SHA) supports the goal of this legislation – requiring a safe school route analysis early in the development review process. It is consistent with SHA's mission to proactively address vulnerable road user safety, including through infrastructure planning. The bill aligns with the Safe Routes to School program, the Pedestrian Safety Action Plan, and the State's broader Vision Zero goals in reducing roadway fatalities and serious injuries.

HB1296 addresses a critical gap in Maryland's land use and transportation planning process. In many cases, developments are approved without a systematic evaluation of whether students can safely walk or bike to school. By requiring a Safe School Route Report at the preliminary subdivision or site plan stage, the bill ensures that pedestrian and bike route safety is assessed proactively – before neighborhoods are built without sufficient infrastructure and become costly for the local jurisdiction or State to correct. This approach is consistent with SHA's commitment to provide multimodal access, connectivity and safety for the communities we serve.

As drafted, the bill is not clear on the responsible party to implement improvements identified in the report. Many school routes cross or run along State-maintained highways under SHA's jurisdiction. Without a clear assignment of responsibility, there is a risk that local jurisdictions could condition development approvals on infrastructure improvements to State highways, effectively obligating SHA to fund or construct improvements outside of the normal State capital programming process.

The SHA's capital investments are planned and prioritized through the Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP), a process that involves rigorous statewide prioritization, public input, and budgeting.

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If House Bill 1296 were interpreted to require SHA to construct improvements identified in a Safe School Route Report, it would allow individual development approvals to effectively dictate State highway capital spending outside of the CTP. This would circumvent the established process and potentially create unfunded mandates.

Finally, when a proposed Safe School Route Report identifies improvements along a State-maintained highway or right-of-way, SHA must maintain oversight authority to ensure that any improvements on State roads are feasible, appropriate and consistent with SHA design standards and protecting the public's interest and investments in State roads.

MDOT respectfully requests that the bill be amended to clarify that local jurisdictions may only condition development approvals on improvements completed by the developer, and that SHA approval is required for any improvements proposed within State rights-of-way.

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee consider this information during their deliberations and issue House Bill 1296 a favorable report with SHA's proposed amendment.

Respectfully submitted,

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