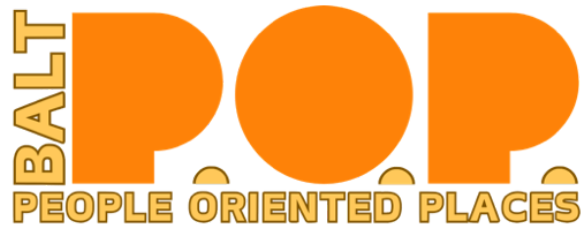


Bill: HB1421

Bill Title: Task Force to Study Pedestrian and Bicyclist Injuries and Fatalities

Position: **Unfavorable**



Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

As a group that advocates for transportation options which contribute to the liveability, productivity, and overall appeal of our communities comprising the Baltimore region, we support efforts to make our transportation system safer and more convenient for vulnerable road users (VRUs) such as pedestrians and cyclists. That said, we are opposed to HB1421.

The goals of this bill and subsequent study are, at best, misinformed. At worst, they are in bad faith. There is no need for another study. The recommendations sought are already published for public consumption and reference. One such publication is the report *Dangerous By Design 2024* by Smart Growth America. [1] A second publication is the report *Beyond Blame: How Cities Can Learn From Crashes To Create Safer Streets Today* by Strong Towns. [2] These publications and other existing work by concerned organizations have analyzed decades of data and obviate the need for a task force and study.

What we need is to act on the knowledge that is already available. While the U.S. seems to have accepted road deaths as the cost of doing business, other countries have managed to make their streets far less deadly. One of the main ways they have done this is by lowering a road's **design speed** — limiting how fast people can drive by changing a road's layout.

Since higher speeds lead to more severe crashes, lowering speeds in key areas — for example, places where cars and pedestrians interact — leads to far fewer deaths. This is one of the major tenets of Vision Zero: designing roads that “self-enforce” lower speeds. Through the use of designs like chicanes and roundabouts, we can create a road system that is less deadly and more forgiving of errors [3].

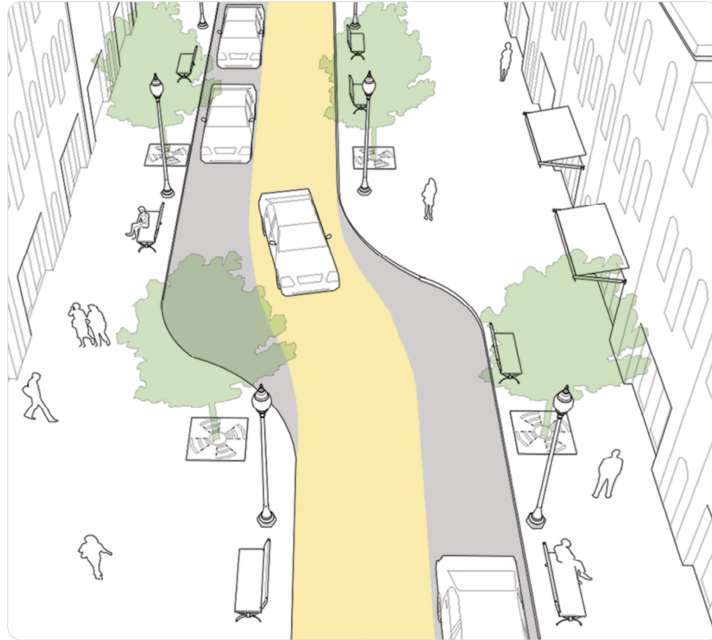


Figure 1: A chicane, slowing traffic by forcing drivers into a slight bend (NACTO, "[Chicane](#)")

This point is very important to stress - people are human and they are going to make mistakes. The text of this bill, with its mentions of dark clothing and VRU's reducing their own negligence, would seem to presuppose another public education campaign. Such campaigns amount to victim-blaming. (This includes drivers, who are set up for failure via excessive design speeds.) And any effort whose goal is to change human nature is destined to fail.

A task force is not needed and neither is this bill. Please read the literature that is already available and the solution becomes clear - slow down automobiles via lower design speeds. Chuck Marohn, founder of Strong Towns, captures it well:

Most drivers will drive at whatever speed feels comfortable for the road they're driving on. This is known as the design speed of the road. Unfortunately, the design speed is frequently higher than the posted speed limit. Drivers will slow down if and when the road is designed in a way that makes them uncomfortable. This is accomplished by narrowing lane widths, reducing visibility, varying the height and texture of the roadway surface, placing impediments along the side of the roadway, etc. Many countries outside of the US and Canada do this, with great success. The street design should be changed until drivers are going the desired speed. If you make a road wide, simple, and straight, most people will drive quickly on it. If you make it narrow, complex, and twisty, most people will drive slowly on it.

We hope the committee finds these points helpful and convincing and we urge its members to **vote against HB1421**. Thank you for your efforts and the opportunity for us to testify on this legislation.

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

References:

[1] Smart Growth America. *Dangerous by Design 2024*. May 2024.

<https://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/signature-reports/dangerous-by-design/>

[2] Strong Towns. *Beyond Blame: How Cities Can Learn From Crashes To Create Safer Streets Today* by Strong Towns. October 2024.

<https://actionlab.strongtowns.org/hc/en-us/articles/32317922505108-Crash-Analysis-Studio-Report-Beyond-Blame-How-Cities-Can-Learn-from-Crashes-to-Create-Safer-Streets-Today>

[3] Vision Zero Network. "Fundamentals of the Safe System Approach". March 27, 2023.

<https://visionzeronetwork.org/fundamentals-of-the-safe-system-approach/>