

Maryland Transportation Authority Pedestrian Safety HB135

This bill closes gaps in our statewide plans for pedestrian and cyclist safety by aligning Maryland Transportation Authority safety requirements with the State Highway Administration's and other Maryland modal transportation administrations'.

Background:

The State of Maryland and Maryland communities have prioritized the development and construction of safe and connected networks for walking, biking and active transportation. In every county across the state there are sidewalks, paths, and trails that enable hundreds of thousands of Marylanders to travel to work, school, and other daily destinations, and enjoy the outdoors. For the State Highway Administration (SHA), this infrastructure reflects a Complete Streets policy implemented in 2012¹, capturing a "philosophy of developing context sensitive solutions that support pedestrian bicycle, ADA and transit accessibility has driven our approach for many years."

The Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) is responsible for our state's toll facilities including two turnpikes, two tunnels and four bridges. Unlike all the other MDOT modal agencies including the SHA, the MDTA is currently not required to create plans that follow a state Complete Streets legislative directive enacted in 2018. This has led to lost opportunities to boost safety by creating multimodal options as part of key MDTA projects, notably the Harry W. Nice Memorial Bridge and the Intercounty Connector.

Plans like this are safer, better for our economy, more accessible for all Marylanders, and more environmentally sustainable than our motor vehicle-focused transportation system currently is. Unfortunately, Maryland has significant gaps in these local and national networks, sometimes due to water crossings and also to interstate highways that lack safe, grade-separated walk/bike crossings.

The Solution:

This bill will implement the following changes to the Transportation Article:

- Removes the section preventing pedestrians and cyclists from using MDTA highways with the stipulation that cyclists can only use the shoulder if it is wide enough and there is not already a separated path.
- Requires MDTA to construct protected pathways on new and existing bridges if they will be doing major renovations. This has been done on recent bridges of varying length around the U.S. including the replacement Tappan Zee and Pensacola Bay bridges. Locally, the Woodrow Wilson and Frederick Douglas Bridges have such facilities which are quite popular.
- Requires MDTA, in collaboration with others, to identify locations for and plan to construct protected pathways that cross or run parallel to MDTA highways - When identifying these locations, MDTA will prioritize connecting to transit stations, critical needs locations, neighborhoods separated by MDTA highways, and traversing natural barriers.
- If MDTA believes construction to not be feasible, it may request a waiver that will go to the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee and need approval from the Secretary of Transportation.

¹ https://www.roads.maryland.gov/oppen/sha_complete_street_policy.pdf

For more information please contact:

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