



Bill 11-23, Motor Vehicles and Traffic – Traffic Signals, Devices, and Automated Enforcement Plan (The Safe Streets Act of 2023)

March 21, 2023

Council President Glass and Council Members,

The Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) supports Bill 11-23, the Safe Streets Act of 2023.

WABA is a nonprofit organization with 1,300 Maryland members. We empower people to ride bikes, build connections, and transform places. We envision a just and sustainable transportation system where walking, biking, and transit are the best ways to get around.

The Safe Streets Act advances Montgomery County toward meeting our Vision Zero commitment. We agree that progress has been made to reduce injuries and deaths on our roadways via sidewalk installations, dedicated bike lanes, automated traffic enforcement, and other traffic calming techniques. This Act will help us make further progress.

We appreciate a provision that may seem peripheral to some, the requirement that the County Executive provide an automated enforcement action plan. The County's Office of Legislative Oversight has found severe racial disparities in police traffic enforcement. The OLO's findings were reported in a 2020 report, *Local Policing Data and Best Practices*, with an October 2022 update via OLO Memorandum Report 2022-12. Automated enforcement is far less discriminatory than police stops.

We recommend a modification to the Act, that the Traffic Infrastructure Review provision cover all students going to or from school in Montgomery County, regardless of time, distance from school, mode, or road jurisdiction, as well as all collisions of any sort with a person in an established County school zone or on school property during arrival or dismissal. And please consider extending the Act to Suburban areas.

We look forward to Bill 11-23's enactment and implementation, and to working with you on steps beyond those covered by the bill.

What steps beyond?

The County Council and County Executive should encourage Montgomery County municipalities to adopt Safe Streets Act provisions themselves, covering municipally owned streets in their own downtown and town center areas and possibly their suburban areas, that is, provisions for Traffic Infrastructure Review, No Right Turn on Red, Leading Pedestrian Intervals at crossings, and creation of an Automated Traffic Enforcement Plan.

And beyond the Safe Streets Act, Montgomery County should lower speed limits county-wide, on arterials and in downtown and town center areas and specifically to 20 MPH on residential streets. Compare that effective July 1, 2020, the District of Columbia established a default speed limit of 20 mph for all local streets, residential streets that primarily serve neighborhood traffic.

Why lower speed limits?

According to the Federal Highway Administration, “a driver traveling at 30 miles per hour who hits a pedestrian has a 45 percent chance of killing or seriously injuring them. At 20 miles per hour, that percentage drops to 5 percent.” Similar fatality and serious-injury stats apply for bicyclists struck by a driver traveling at a higher versus a lower speed.

Maryland Transportation Code §21-803 allows alteration of maximum speed limits by local authorities but requires “performing an engineering and traffic investigation” for streets whose limit is to be lowered. The County should request a 2024 Maryland local bill or a state-wide bill to allow speed-limit reduction for an entire jurisdiction or area following creation of a jurisdiction- or area-wide complete-streets plan. Then the County should follow up with complete-streets plans and speed-limit reductions, with systematic reduction to 20 MPH on residential streets rather than the project-linked steps outlined in the County’s 2021 complete-streets guide. This is the next step you can and should take, after enacting the Safe Streets Act of 2023, to advance Montgomery County toward Vision Zero.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. The Washington Area Bicyclist Association supports Bill 11-23, the Safe Streets Act of 2023. We thank Council President Glass for developing this legislation and the nine County Council Member co-sponsors, and urge you to start now on further steps to realize Vision Zero in Montgomery County.

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