



MC 10-24 – Montgomery County – Highways – Maximum Speed Limits
Washington Area Bicyclist Association – FAVORABLE

December 1, 2023

Chairs Kramer and Palakovich Carr and Members of the Montgomery County Delegation,

The Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA), an advocacy organization with 1,200 Maryland members, supports bill MC 10-24.

Speed kills. According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "Studies clearly show that higher speeds result in greater impact at the time of a crash, which leads to more severe injuries and fatalities." For instance, a 2011 technical report published by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, "Impact Speed and a Pedestrian's Risk of Severe Injury or Death," found that the average risk of severe injury to a pedestrian increased with vehicle speed from 10% at 16 MPH, 25% at 23 MPH, 50% at 31 MPH, and higher at higher speeds.

In response, MC 10-24 would strike eight no-longer-needed words from Maryland's Transportation Article, the stipulation that Montgomery County and county municipalities may lower speed limits "only after performing an engineering and traffic investigation." This requirement is no longer needed given the county's 2021 adoption of a Complete Streets Design Guide as well as the development of functional master plans such as the Pedestrian Master Plan, which was adopted earlier this fall.

These plans provide analysis, design, and engineering guidance that is equivalent to the current law's investigation. There is a precedent for your advancing MC 10-24 on this basis. Transportation Article § 21-803 (5) states "Baltimore City may, without performing an engineering and traffic investigation, decrease the maximum speed limit on a highway under its jurisdiction." The reason for this exemption is that Baltimore City adopted a Complete Streets program, in 2018. MC 10-24 would extend Baltimore's exemption to Montgomery County and county municipalities.

Gaithersburg and Rockville, which have their own planning authority, and other county municipalities may apply the county's Complete Streets Design Guide to city-owned streets.

The county's Complete Streets Design Guide was developed by Montgomery Planning and enacted by the Montgomery County Council. It is county policy. It designates a Target Speed of 20 MPH for Downtown Streets, Neighborhood Connectors, Neighborhood Streets, Neighborhood Yield Streets, and certain Country Roads, in particular for stretches where they "operate as neighborhood streets for short segments."

Recommendation P-9 of Montgomery County's Pedestrian Master Plan, adopted in October by the County Council, is "Comprehensively lower speed limits countywide." The text explains, "*Higher traffic speeds are directly linked to crash severity. In pursuit of Vision Zero, the county should continue efforts to*

lower speed limits in neighborhoods and along major roadways, with a goal of having the roadway's posted speed limit match the target speed outlined in the CSDG [Complete Streets Design Guide]."

Montgomery County has been inhibited from reducing speed limits in accordance with county policy by the current engineering and traffic investigation requirement.

That's why we have Recommendation P-9a, to "Support state legislation to allow jurisdiction-wide speed limit reduction." The detail text reads, "*Montgomery County's ability to lower the posted and statutory speed limit along residential streets is limited by state law... The county should support all legislation that offers local agencies more flexibility in setting speed limits in line with county goals.*"

MC 10-24 responds directly to a recommendation adopted by the Montgomery County Council.

Finally, you may be wondering why the requirement exists. A former colleague of yours told me that "that engineering studies were the best way to depoliticize the issue" of speed-limit reduction. We no longer see speed reductions as a politicized matter. Reduction benefits are incontrovertible. Yet we have this lingering requirement for an investigation on a road-by-road basis, which is expensive and onerous. You can modernize code and boost Montgomery County road safety by advancing MC 10-24.

WABA therefore urges you to support MC 10-24 and work in Annapolis in the coming months to enact it.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation.

Seth Grimes, WABA Maryland organizer
seth.grimes@waba.org