



HB 278: Urban State Highways - Speed Limits - Exceptions  
House Environment and Transportation Committee  
Washington Area Bicyclist Association – FAVORABLE

February 8, 2024

Chair Korman and Committee Members,

**The Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) supports HB 278, which would authorize the State Highway Administration to decrease the maximum speed limit by 5 miles per hour on urban state highways without an engineering and traffic investigation.**

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,

HB 278 would directly address vehicle speed, a factor that is known to make our streets more dangerous for pedestrians and bicyclists and all road users.

Reduction in posted speed limits is part of the Context Driven toolkit that is applied by the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA). The SHA positions limit reduction as a safety countermeasure in urban and suburban contexts, "as part of the proactive treatments aimed at increasing safety for vulnerable road users." The SHA's Context Driven Toolkit states, "in denser context areas, a reduction in the posted speed limit may have a significant impact on safety for more vulnerable users, including pedestrians and bicyclists. Higher operating speeds reduce a driver's ability to react when they encounter these users in the road, and result in higher severity outcomes when collisions occur."

However the requirement to conduct an engineering and traffic investigation, on a road-by-road basis, is onerous. It is expensive, time-consuming, and a deterrent to taking steps we know we must take. Let us recognize that MDOT's work on Complete Streets, Context Driven, and Vision Zero strategies fully justifies allowing the SHA discretion in speed-limit reduction, as would be afforded by HB 278.

The General Assembly has an opportunity to boost Maryland road safety by enacting HB 278. Please take it.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation.

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