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Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 254 – “State Highway Administration – Pedestrian and Bicyclist Fatalities – Infrastructure Review (Vision Zero Implementation Act of 2022)”

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 3, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports HB 254, which would require the State Highway Administration (SHA) to conduct an infrastructure review of each pedestrian or bicyclist fatality that occurs on a State highway or at an intersection of a State highway and another highway or a municipal street. The infrastructure review would need to identify deficiencies in engineering, traffic control, and traffic operations along with appropriate corrective actions and crash reduction countermeasures. The review would need to be completed within six months and be published on the SHA website.

We live in a car-centric culture where transportation planning, roads, and vehicle laws are focused on getting vehicles to their destinations as swiftly as possible. According to the Maryland Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Administration’s Highway Safety Office, there were 542 traffic fatalities in our state last year, including 132 pedestrian and bicycle deaths. Pedestrians and bicyclists are some of the most vulnerable road users. In a crash with a car, it is usually no contest for someone who is walking or biking. We need the SHA to examine where the pedestrian and bike fatalities occur and introduce improvements such as adding or upgrading crosswalks, improving lighting, narrowing travel lanes, reducing speed limits, and addressing the needs of persons with disabilities.

While it is true that not everyone is able to walk, bike or take transit where they need to go, it is also true that not everyone can drive for any number of reasons -- including age, health, and finances. Therefore, roadway design should serve everyone regardless of transportation mode. The state transportation system can promote equity by assuring that everyone has a safe way to get to their job, education, and housing.

Transportation is now the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in our state. Tailpipe emissions are also a major source of health-damaging air pollution. There is a growing need to get individuals out of their private cars, to take transit, ride bikes/scooters, and walk more. These modes reduce air pollution and increase physical health. We need to do more to support these changes.

In summary, the high number of pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities that continue to occur on our highways is totally unacceptable and indicates new measures must be undertaken to dramatically lessen and ideally eliminate all traffic deaths. HB 254 would help make that happen. We urge a favorable report on this bill.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.