



WASHINGTON AREA BICYCLIST ASSOCIATION

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November 2, 2012

Delegate Aruna Miller
House Office Building, Room 225
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Delegate Miller:

The Washington Area Bicyclist's Association (WABA) appreciates very much your efforts to help both Montgomery County and the State of Maryland to better integrate bicycles into the transportation network. One of your initiatives last year was HB 946, which would legalize riding bicycles on sidewalks throughout most of Maryland. Because we took no position on that bill last year and you have indicated that you may reintroduce a similar bill this year, I am writing to share our views on such legislation.

Like you, we think that under some circumstances, cyclists are safer riding on a sidewalk than in the roadway. Provided there is little risk to pedestrians, we would like to see the law allow cyclists to ride on those sidewalks that can be safe bike routes. Nevertheless, we do not believe that 2013 would be a good year for the General Assembly to consider a bill like HB 946.

Mile-per-mile, cyclists experience more crashes on sidewalks than on roadways. Whether it is safer to ride on a sidewalk depends on specific factors, such as the presence of pedestrians, the width of the sidewalk, the amount of driveways and cross streets, the speed and direction of the cyclist, and the speed and volume of roadway traffic. It may be possible to develop a consensus defining which sidewalks are clearly safer than adjacent roadways, but that consensus has not yet emerged. We are not even sure whether the best way forward would be for legislation to legalize riding on some or all sidewalk, or to delegate such decisions to the transportation departments, which routinely make site-specific traffic control decisions.

We are also concerned that recent efforts by both WABA and the State Highway Administration to establish cyclists as legitimate roadway users could be diluted by sidewalk legislation. Although legalizing something need not mean promoting it, we think that HB 946 would be widely viewed as the state encouraging cyclists to ride on sidewalks. With bikeshare coming to many areas of the state, we think that bike lanes and cycle tracks would best promote safe cycling. And a large influx of bicycles on sidewalks could undermine general public support for bikeshare.

Finally, we are concerned about the legislation's possible impact on Prince George's County. Unlike other Maryland jurisdictions, the Prince George's County Department of Public Works and Transportation can legalize cycling on a sidewalk-specific basis. Several key officials in the Department want to work with us to prudently expand the official sidewalk network of bikeways where doing so

promotes safety, but due to a peculiarity of the county ordinance, HB 946 would take that power away. Unfortunately, other officials have stated a belief that cyclists should ride on the sidewalk rather than the roadway. A new state law concerning bikes on sidewalks would reinforce that preference.

For these reasons, we would plan to take no position during 2013 on any bill to legalize riding bicycles on sidewalks. We are interested, however, in exchanging ideas on how to best allow cycling on sidewalks where doing so is safe without promoting it where doing so is unsafe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shane Farthing". The signature is stylized with loops and a long tail.

Shane Farthing
Executive Director