National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Federal Lands Transportation Program
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The Baltimore-Washington Parkway Traffic Safety Plan

The Baltimore-Washington (B-W) Parkway is a limited-access divided highway primarily located in Prince Georges County, Maryland. The highway connects the two major metropolitan areas and provides access to a number of major regional developments, including office parks, shopping malls, entertainment venues, and the Baltimore/Washington International Airport.

Fall colors on the Baltimore-Washington Parkway. (NPS photo)

The National Park Service owns and operates the 19-mile section of the B-W Parkway between Route 175 (Annapolis Road/Jessup Road) at its northern boundary, and Route 50 (New York Avenue) at its southern boundary. (The Maryland State Highway Administration owns and operates a 10-mile section of the B-W Parkway between I-695 and Route 175.)

The B-W Parkway opened in 1954 as an alternative to nearby U.S. Route 1; at that time the average annual daily traffic (AADT) level was approximately 21,000 vehicles. No capacity improvements have been made since the original construction, but a 2013 study showed the AADT approaching 120,000 vehicles, a nearly five-fold increase. The NPS segment of the B-W Parkway typically has two 12-foot travel lanes in each direction, an 8-foot paved right hand shoulder, and curbs and gutters on both sides.

Over the past decade, a number of studies have documented the traffic safety issues on the NPS portion of the B-W Parkway. These include overcapacity operating conditions, roadway features inconsistent with industry transportation safety standards, difficult traffic enforcement procedures due to narrow shoulders and medians, and limited driver situational awareness.

Current Conditions

Traffic safety and congestion are major concerns on the B-W Parkway. An average of six fatalities and 547 crashes per year have occurred on the B-W Parkway since 2006. One in four crashes results in injury or death.

Of all the NPS regions, the National Capital Region (NCR) has the most vehicle crashes, accounting for 39 percent of all crashes in the NPS. The urban parkways located within the NCR have the highest traffic volume as compared to other parks, since these facilities serve primarily as commuter routes.

The Plan and the Process

The Baltimore-Washington Parkway Traffic Safety Plan (draft) provides an action plan to implement safety improvements tied to the proven strategies of the "4Es" of transportation safety: Engineering, Education, Enforcement, and Emergency services.

According to Makayah Royal, NCR's Transportation Program Manager, "We wanted a broad-based planning process to consider a wide-range of possible strategies. Both the NPS and external stakeholders participated in the development of this plan."

The draft plan has been the result of a series of in-person and web-based scoping meetings. The project team held a kick-off meeting in November 2013 with National Capital

Parks East (NACE) personnel, the U.S. Park Police, and the Acting Superintendent for the B-W Parkway.

This was followed by a February 2014 web conference during which stakeholders were introduced to the safety project and initial ideas for improving traffic safety on the B-W Parkway were compiled. At an in-person stakeholders workshop in April 2014, participants received an overview of the safety issues, and had an opportunity to voice concerns and brainstorm potential actions for improving safety on the Parkway.

Goals and Objectives of the Plan

The goal for the B-W Parkway Traffic Safety Plan is to reduce fatalities and serious injuries using a cooperative approach of leadership, collaboration, communication, and data analysis. The plan's objectives refer to both driver behavior and infrastructure issues, including:

- Promote transportation safety in projects and policies without threatening park resources and values.
- Collect and analyze crash data to make better investment decisions.
- Reduce transportation-related incidents and prepare for future emergencies.
- Incorporate 4E considerations into transportation safety projects.

Baltimore-Washington Parkway (NPS Photo)

Recommendations proposed in the plan are meant to consider both staff and funding resources, reduce crashes and fatalities, and enhance mobility on the B-W Parkway. Stakeholders identified the top three safety issues on the B-W Parkway as: speeding, distracted driving, and congestion.

One of the key conclusions of the stakeholder process was that the NPS should convene a B-W Parkway Task Force, comprised of internal and external stakeholders, to keep the momentum of the process moving forward.

The draft plan includes more than twenty-five recommendations—both short-term (6 to 12 months) and medium-term (1 to 5 years)—spread across the 4Es. Examples include:

- Improved pavement markings and signing.
- Improved traffic law enforcement.
- New outreach efforts targeted at changing driver behavior.
- Improved emergency response time.

"I am very encouraged by the progress we have made," Makayah said. "Recommendations are being considered and evaluated by NPS staff, and at the conclusion of the planning process, feasible recommendations can be formalized in the NPS Project Information Management System and programmed for implementation."