Northbound news

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from the desk of
TIM SMITH
ADMINISTRATOR

Welcome back!

If you're a member of Team MDOT SHA who has been teleworking since the pandemic State of Emergency went into effect in March 2020, welcome back to the office! If you're a Team MDOT SHA member who reported to the office throughout the pandemic, thanks for holding down the fort!

It's hard to believe that after 15 months, we're back! Please know that we are here to support you during this back-to-office transition, and our goal is to help ensure you feel safe and secure so together, we can navigate the road ahead.

Here are some things we are implementing to help keep our workplace safe and to support you:

- Facility Access Screening has been discontinued. However, signs are posted that ask that you refrain from entering the facility if you are experiencing COVID-related symptoms.

- Contact your supervisor and stay home if you have tested COVID-positive in last 10 days or have been COVID tested and are waiting on results, or if you are not fully vaccinated and have recently been exposed to a positive individual or symptomatic (untested) individual.

- Face Masks are no longer required to be worn in MDOT SHA facilities. However, if you are not yet vaccinated, you are strongly encouraged to continue to wear a face mask. Also, if you are uncomfortable for any reason, you may continue to wear a face mask in the workplace. Please respect your coworkers' choices to wear or not wear a face mask.

- Social Distancing is no longer required for vaccinated staff members. If you are unvaccinated, you are encouraged to continue to maintain a distance of six feet between yourself and others if possible. Anyone who is uncomfortable with closer distances may also continue to practice social distancing.

- State Vehicle Occupancy Limits are discontinued effective July 5, 2021. If you are unvaccinated, we encourage you to continue to wear a face mask if you are in a state vehicle with one or more other employees. High-touch areas in Pool or shared vehicles should be wiped down before and after each use.

- Elevator Occupancy Limits are discontinued. Please continue to wear a face mask when you are in an elevator with others if you are unvaccinated or uncomfortable.

- Conference Rooms/Training Rooms/TEAMS Meetings. Because many locations will have a hybrid operation with some employees teleworking on various days, continued use of Microsoft TEAMS for group meetings is encouraged. Conference Rooms and Training Rooms may be used for in-person meetings as needed. Cleaning supplies will be provided in each room, and we ask that you wipe down furniture and other items used in the conference rooms and training rooms before and after your meeting. Social distancing and wearing of face masks may be continued for in-person meetings if participants are unvaccinated or uncomfortable in a group setting.

- Break Areas are open without restrictions. As always, if you are unvaccinated or if you are in any way uncomfortable, you are encouraged to wear a face mask while using these areas.

- Continued Reporting of Exposures and COVID Testing. Until the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) revises its guidance, please continue to contact your supervisor if you 1) you are experiencing COVID-related symptoms, 2) if you have tested COVID positive in the last 10 days, 3) if you are waiting on the results of a COVID test, or 4) if

you are not fully vaccinated and have been exposed to someone who recently tested positive or is experiencing symptoms compatible with COVID.

Other concerns not addressed here should be discussed with your supervisor. Employees who wish to be considered for an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodation should contact either Khadriah Ward or Olufemi Akanny in the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO).

We've all been through a lot over the last few months, and I know we're all looking forward to easing back into regular routines. Thank you for your patience and cooperation during these unprecedented times, as you continued to do an amazing job keeping our customers connected to life's opportunities during a global pandemic. While many things have changed, one thing has remained the same: our commitment to YOU – our valued employees! Welcome back, Team MDOT SHA!

MDOT SHA Publishes Cheswick the Crab Safety Book

With Ocean City's busy vacation season underway, there has never been a better time to remind visitors and residents to walk smart, drive smart and bike smart when traveling around Maryland's most populated beach town. As part of our OC Walk Smart! Campaign, MDOT SHA has captured important roadway safety information in the newly published Cheswick the Crab and the Smart Summer book.

Last month, the Cheswick the Crab mascot and safety ambassadors distributed almost 1,000 copies of the book to families visiting OC's Boardwalk, and additional books were disbursed to four visitor centers in the area and to the five branches of the Worcester County Library.

With colorful illustrations depicting familiar sites in Ocean City, Cheswick the Crab and the Smart Summer teaches the importance of roadway safety basics

in a beach-friendly, family-fun manner. Geared toward young children, parents reading the book to their kids will also be reminded of the rules of the road.

Developed by MDOT SHA and its partners, including the Town of Ocean City, Ocean City Police Department, Maryland Highway Safety Office, Peninsula Regional Medical Center and other agencies and local businesses back in 2013, the OC Walk Smart! Campaign featuring Cheswick the Crab harnesses the four "E's" of safety: engineering, education, enforcement and EMS to turn the tide on the increase of pedestrian-involved crashes in Ocean City.

Some of you might remember that when the campaign began, Cheswick was known as "Crab the Lifeguard." After holding an online naming contest, the crab was renamed Cheswick as a tribute to Matthew Cheswick, who was struck and killed by a vehicle while walking along Coastal Highway.

Written by Christopher Cheswick, Matthew's father, and illustrated by family friend Krissy Baxter, an online copy of Cheswick the Crab and the Smart Summer can be found at www.oceancitymd.gov/oc/walksmart/.

Mapillary Provides New Way to Photograph Roads and Assets
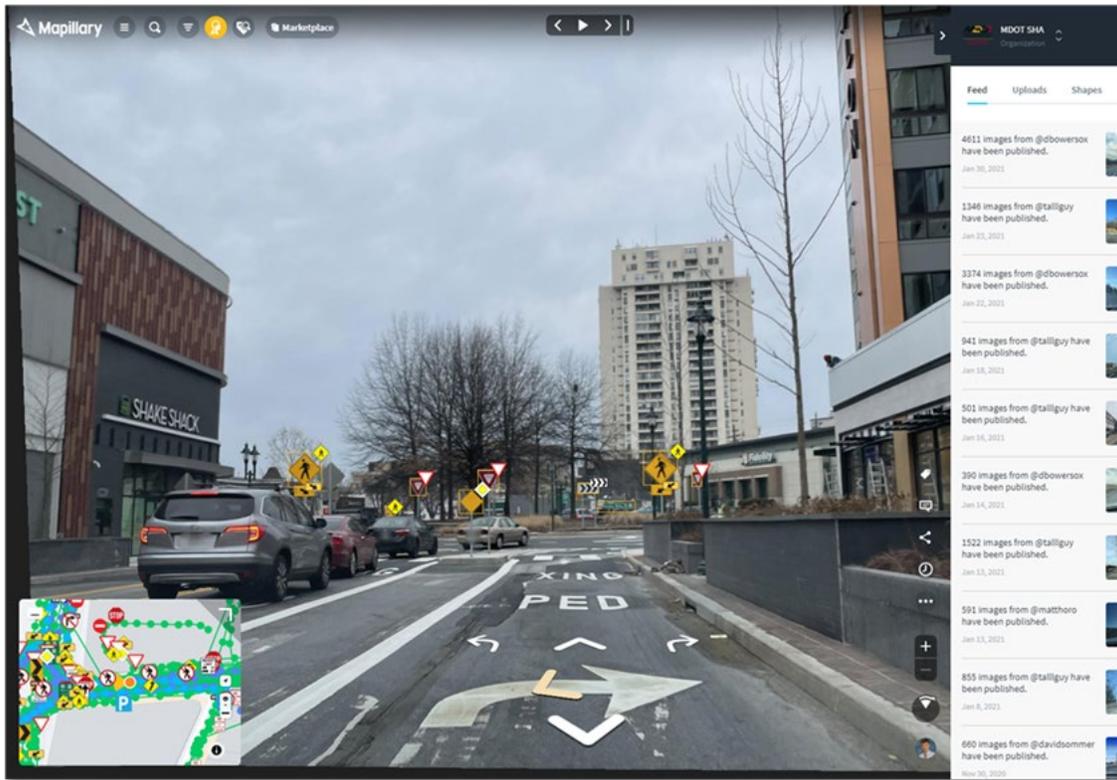
Mapillary lets you take and access images over the life of a project.

If you need to inspect a culvert on a heavily trafficked road, you might feel frustrated finding a way to examine it without risking your safety or closing a road. If you had the right equipment and software, though, you might learn a lot just by looking at a picture.

MDOT SHA has begun utilizing Mapillary (recently acquired by Facebook), which collects detailed road information by taking bursts of photos while a user simply drives down the roadway. Photos are automatically uploaded to Mapillary. This lets you see how roadways and their assets have changed over time in a given area. This timely information helps a lot.

"Mapillary is a crowd-sourced, street-level imagery platform tool utilized to automatically capture and upload the latest in roadway images" explains GIS Program Management Support Consultant Marshall Stevenson. "Mapillary uses the latest in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) for roadway asset extraction technologies."

To take photos using Mapillary, you mount your cell phone on your dashboard and drive at regular roadway speeds (a high-end GoPro-style camera can be used to improve imagery and image extraction).

Mapillary is notable for what it adds and what it subtracts. Mapillary adds icons to its desktop viewer, depicting roadway asset features and their location, such as traffic and speed signs with their designated speed noted. To protect the privacy of individual information in the photos, Mapillary runs a process to subtract personally identifiable information via the blurring of license plates and people's faces.

You can summon photos along the same section of roadway that were taken at different points in time, letting you review and track project progress. Managers can help maintenance crews identify potential repairs to be addressed from the convenience and safety of the office.

Additional advantages for MDOT SHA include:

- Improving safety by minimizing time and exposure in the field.
- Maximizing data collection efficiency as an initial in-office activity.
- Rapid capture and inventory of improvements to roadways.
- Integrating with MDOT SHA and the State's standard Esri-powered GIS solutions.
- Coordination in image capture with MDOT SHA's OIT unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS)/drone program.
- Future utilization of automated AI and ML for feature/data extraction, potential change detection and work order creation.

MDOT SHA OIT is currently evaluating the automated upload of its historical roadway imagery library captured via its Automatic Road Analyzer (ARAN) images, specialized for capture of roadway pavement condition to Mapillary. Uploading both past, current, and future MDOT SHA ARAN images to Mapillary will let MDOT SHA staff leverage the power of Mapillary for image visualization on or off MDOT SHA's network.

"You can use machine learning for change detection," adds Senior Business Analyst Elliott Plack. "Taking photos at two different times, the software will detect where a sign was and if it was knocked down and needs replacement."
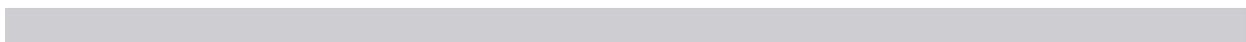
For more information on Mapillary and/or how to participate in the MDOT SHA Mapillary data collection group, please contact the OIT Enterprise GIS Team at GIS@mdot.maryland.gov

Shared Streets to Test New Bicycle Path in Wheaton

As more commuters consider walking or bicycling to work, last month MDOT SHA launched a pilot program in Montgomery County to determine if safe bicycle paths can encourage multi-modal travel while keeping highway traffic flowing.

The Shared Streets Pilot program follows MD 193 from the popular Sligo Creek Trail and continues 1.35 miles right into the Wheaton Central Business District.

"Shared Streets is a collaborative, Statewide initiative in direct response to a changing, more dynamic transportation landscape," explains Engineering Systems Team Leader Urooj Zafar. "Shared Streets not only relates to the lower traffic levels we've seen during the pandemic but how we look towards the future, as well. It's a strategy for repurposing the existing right of way to better align with Context Driven, which adds a layer of context and a human element to the way we approach projects. Our Context Driven approach balances access and mobility along our State roadways, and this project is a perfect example of that."

A great group ride today along the new University Blvd bike lanes in Wheaton. This is the first of its kind for a state highway in MD! Thanks to @MDSHA for partnering with us to make it happen.

Proof that sectioning off part of a street wouldn't restrict traffic began in the recovering days of COVID-19, says Consultant Project Manager Joseph Moges.

"In that instance," he says, "the rightmost lane of northbound US 29 (Georgia Ave) was closed for outdoor dining. That successful proof of concept was later applied to a different roadway for a different modality. In this case, we are applying the concept along University Boulevard to bicyclists and pedestrians."

MD 193 was chosen for the pilot, he says, when studies showed that a lane reduction to free up a bicycle path was feasible because it would only result in minor delays for vehicular traffic.

The project includes:

- Reducing the number of vehicular through-lanes on MD 193.
- Repurposing MD 193 travel lanes adjacent to the curbs for use by bicyclists.
- Modifying lane assignments to connect bicyclists to MD 193 interim bike lanes.
- Adding flexible posts – or "vertical delineators" – to separate vehicle and bike lanes.
- Updating signage and striping.

After the pilot concludes and the delineators come down, MDOT SHA will look at the results to see how well it worked.

Says Moges, "The project will gather data points such as safety, continuous collection of pedestrian volumes and bicycle ridership. Of course, we will also assess operational impacts such as traffic calming/speed, queuing, delay, signal timing, and Bicycle Level of Comfort (BLOC). We'll tabulate changes in pedestrian and bicycle activity from before and during the project. Then we can decide how to build on all we learned."

SOCIAL MEDIA OF THE MONTH

Our safety depends on it - Remind your friends and family.

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