



Maryland Transportation Authority

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July 18, 2025

The American Waterways Operators
Attn: Brian Vahey
801 N Quincy St #500
Arlington, VA 22203

Subject: Bay Bridge Recommended Best Practices

Dear Mr. Vahey:

The Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) recommends certain best practices for certain vessels on the approaches to the William Preston Lane, Jr. Memorial Bridge (Bay Bridge) to reduce risk from aberrant vessels. The recommended best practices would be implemented by the Maryland Pilots onboard vessels subject to compulsory state pilotage. On vessels not subject to compulsory state pilotage, the implementation would be the responsibility of the operator. The recommended best practices primarily detail maximum vessel speeds by size of vessel to reduce the overall energy of the vessel and increase available response time during an aberrant vessel incident.

The area for these recommended best practices encompasses the width of Bay Bridge main span extending from navigation buoy "90" north to the entrance of Craighill Channel (yellow area in Figure 1 below). Proposed operational practices would apply to piloted vessels regardless of tonnage and all tug and barge combinations of 10,000 displacement tonnes or more.

The following recommendations would be implemented:

- Transit at safe speed, not to exceed the speed over ground by actual total displacement shown in Table 1 below, except when safety of navigation requires otherwise at the judgment of the pilot in charge based on environmental/meteorological, vessel handling characteristics, or other conditions.
- Vessels should not meet or overtake within the area 1 nautical mile north and south of the bridge (see green area in Figure 1 below).
- Vessels transiting in same direction should maintain separation of one mile.
- While approaching, vessels should pass through gated buoys north and south of bridge – no turns until beyond bridge spans.

Table 1. Maximum speed over ground by actual displacement

Displacement (tonnes)	Maximum Speed Over Ground (knots)
< 50,000	14.0
50,000 – 69,999	13.0
70,000 – 84,999	12.0
85,000 – 99,999	11.0
100,000 – 124,999	10.0
125,000 – 159,999	9.0 or minimum steerage way, whichever is greater
>= 160,000	8.0 or minimum steerage way, whichever is greater

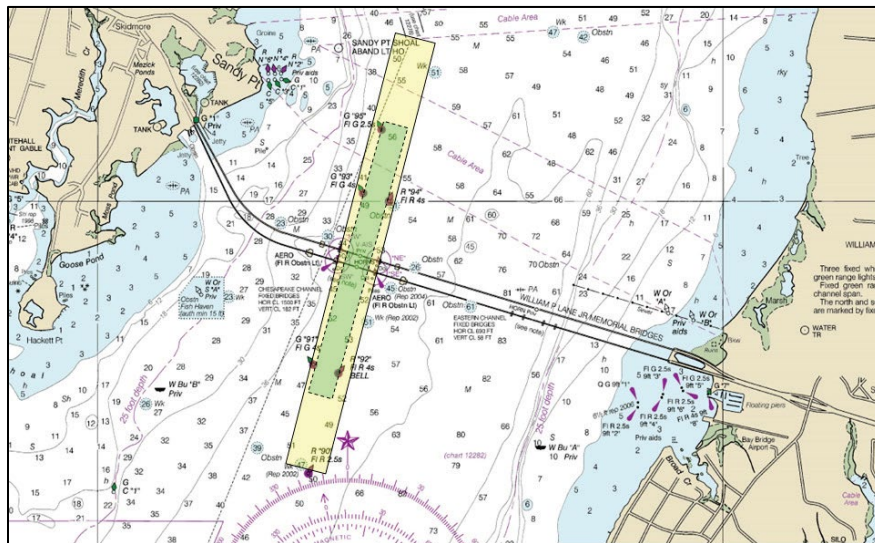


Figure 1: Proposed Recommended Best Practices Area

The MDTA requests the dissemination of these best practices to other recipients as deemed appropriate based on the applicability of the information to their operations on the Chesapeake Bay. The MDTA appreciates the partnership of the American Waterway's Operators in working toward the mutual goal of maintaining safety for mariners and motor vehicles at the Bay Bridge.

Sincerely,

James Harkness, P.E., PTOE
Chief Engineer

cc: Brian Miller, Deputy Executive Director, Operations & Logistics, MPA
Captain Eric Nielsen, President, Association of Maryland Pilots
Ishtiaque Tunio, Director of Engineering, MDTA