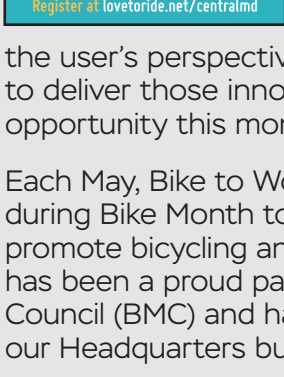


from the desk of

**TIM SMITH**  
ADMINISTRATOR



## Bike Month Activities Encourage Bike Riding and Promote Safety



What is our “Why” at MDOT SHA? To deliver innovative solutions to challenging problems so that we can connect people to life’s opportunities. That is for ALL users – pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. We must often try other forms of transportation to better appreciate how all users traverse our system. When we better understand the user’s perspective by doing it ourselves, it helps us to deliver those innovative solutions for all. We have that opportunity this month.

Each May, Bike to Work Week is celebrated across the country during Bike Month to encourage bicycling to work and to promote bicycling and bicycle safety. In prior years, MDOT SHA has been a proud partner with the Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC) and has hosted an annual pit stop outside of our Headquarters building during Bike to Work Week.

This year’s Bike to Work celebration scheduled for Monday, May 17, through Sunday, May 23, will be a socially distanced, virtual biking challenge to get more people biking due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please join us for Bike to Work Week – if you work remotely, you can still participate! Take a spin around your neighborhood before or after work or enjoy a bike ride during your lunch break. Register for free at [www.biketoworkmd.com](http://www.biketoworkmd.com). Participants have a chance to win prizes, and event t-shirts can be picked up at area bike shops.

To make Bike Month even more fun and a little competitive (yes, I do like to compete), the BMC is offering a free online-biking challenge program called Love to Ride in which participants earn points for every mile they ride, every day they ride and for every new person encouraged to ride.

If you’re like me, you like being part of a team and the camaraderie that takes place among teammates. I think we can still bring that spirit of togetherness during this virtual challenge. MDOT SHA has formed a Love to Ride team. Join our team and start riding. Here’s how you can get started:

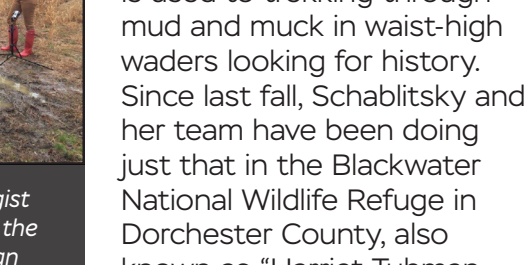
1. Register at [www.lovetoride.net/centralmd](http://www.lovetoride.net/centralmd)
2. When asked if you’d like to join an organization, search and select MDOT State Highway Administration.

Once registered, track your rides, and invite your co-workers to join! In addition to earning points for Team MDOT SHA, you will also be eligible for individual prizes.

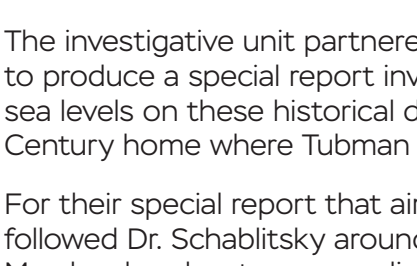
Throughout the month, you can promote the benefits of bike riding and the importance of bicycle safety by sharing our social media posts on your social media platforms. You can also help us reduce the number of bicycle-related crashes on our roads by reinforcing safe bike riding and driving behaviors. Bike riders must stop at all red lights and stop signs, ride with traffic, use marked bike lanes when present, stay visible and wear a helmet correctly. Motorists must stay alert for bicyclists, allow at least three feet when passing, yield the right of way to bicyclists when turning right and look out for bicyclists before opening a car door.

For additional bicycle safety tips, click [here](#).

Stay safe and happy biking!



## MDOT SHA Archaeologists Join DC News Crew to Investigate Climate Threat



MDOT SHA Chief Archaeologist Dr. Julie Schablitsky explains the effect of climate change on an 18th century cabin to a news crew.

### A Race Against Time

Dr. Julie Schablitsky, MDOT SHA’S chief archaeologist, is used to trekking through mud and muck in waist-high waders looking for history. Since last fall, Schablitsky and her team have been doing just that in the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in Dorchester County, also known as “Harriet Tubman Country.” The property, now owned by the U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service (USFWS), was once home to Harriet Tubman and her family. But the home and the rich history that lie in that same mud and muck, may be in jeopardy of washing away. And that is what Washington D.C. area news crew NBC 4 is investigating.

The investigative unit partnered with non-profit Climate Central to produce a special report investigating the effects of rising sea levels on these historical dig sites, including the 18th Century home where Tubman was born.

For their special report that aired on April 6, the NBC 4 crew followed Dr. Schablitsky around the USFWS property back in March, when her team was digging and screening for artifacts.

“The best part of our job is sharing unique stories with so many of our NBC 4 viewers,” said investigative producer Katie Leslie. “We’re grateful for the opportunity to observe this team of archaeologists in pursuit of a critical piece of American history, while shedding light on the risk of sea level rise to these important places.”

### A Discovery of a Lifetime

What the news crew didn’t know when they were in the field with the MDOT SHA team investigating the effects of the climate on these historical sites is that a major discovery would be confirmed just days after their visit.

In early April, Dr. Schablitsky was able to confirm that their months of searching was a success. MDOT SHA made it official during a public announcement on April 20 at the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center in Cambridge. The archaeological team found bricks, dish fragments, and personal artifacts that can be linked to Ben Ross, Tubman’s father.

“The importance of discovering Ben Ross’ cabin here is the connection to Harriet Tubman; she would’ve spent time here as a child but also she would’ve come back and been living here with her father in her teenage years, working alongside of him,” said Dr. Schablitsky. “This was the opportunity she had to learn about the wetlands and the woods, and how to survive and navigate through here. And we believe this experience was able to benefit her when she began to move people to freedom.”

“The Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway connects travelers from around the world to a heroic figure in American and Maryland history, and to the beauty of our Eastern Shore and the Chesapeake Bay,” said MDOT Secretary Greg Slater. “This discovery solidifies another link between transportation and our nation’s history, and it’s our duty and honor to preserve this history so it may be shared with generations to come.”

“Preserving our history is such a critical part of understanding our past,” said SHA Administrator Tim Smith. “And really what MDOT’s about, or why we show up everyday, is connecting people to life’s opportunities ... sometimes we just connect them to the past.”



Bricks, dish fragments and personal artifacts linked to Ben Ross.

## The Challenge of Maintaining Nearly Empty Offices

Victor Henson and Omar Greene at the 707 building like this analogy: If you leave your car in a garage for three months and, when you return, expect it to work the way it did, you’re in for an unwanted surprise. That’s because mechanical systems need regular attention.

“The saying is, ‘A body in motion and a body at rest stays at rest,’” says Greene, a skilled trade specialist III in the Office of Maintenance (OOM).



Lemons into lemonade: With MDOT SHA offices nearly empty because of COVID telework, Maintenance crews find more time to do preventive maintenance. In Hanover’s Building 4, Leroy Daniels (top) examined an HVAC unit and Jason Duffy repaired a boiler.

Maintenance crews at headquarters, Hanover and throughout MDOT SHA have discovered a paradox during the many months of COVID, when buildings are substantially empty. There’s an unexpected jump in work and greater opportunity to make repairs, especially during hours when buildings used to be crowded.

“People think that just because there are fewer people in a building, there’s less work for us,” says Maintenance Supervisor Henson. “It’s just the opposite.”

He observes that when a building is not used, things sit and even degrade. If a pipe breaks in a bathroom that’s hardly used, more damage is done because fewer people are around to alert Maintenance.

Water fountains and bathroom sinks are barely used and systems have to be flushed. Water filtration becomes a problem. Dust settles and becomes more apparent. Elevators that are meant to be used regularly are more liable to break.

The flip side is the opportunity to fix things during regular hours without forcing crews to come after hours and incur overtime costs.

“The Hanover and HQ maintenance teams have continued to ensure our buildings are functional and safe throughout the pandemic. In fact, the lower occupancy has allowed these teams to address issues and make improvements that would otherwise be difficult to schedule during full occupancy,” says OOM Deputy Director of Facility Management Greg Keenan. On July 1, supervision of maintenance crews at headquarters will transfer from the Office of Administration to Keenan.

There is more time during the day to paint, do preventive care on the heating and ventilation system, and complete large projects like overseeing the installation of a new cooling tower at headquarters.

Still, if it breaks in the middle of the night, OOM workers get out of bed and respond.

“Their dedication and work ethic when responding to off-hour power outages, plumbing leaks, critical lab equipment failures and other facility issues is both essential and highly commendable,” says Keenan.

He credits his staff for work that doesn’t always get noticed. “Maintenance teams are the unsung heroes of our organization,” he says. “I am excited that their efforts are now being highlighted.”

## SOCIAL MEDIA OF THE MONTH

Visit MDOT SHA on social media at

Twitter <https://twitter.com/MDSHA>,

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/MDOTSHA>

Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/marylandstatehighwayadmin/>

