

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5177

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Transportation, February 6, 1997

Title: An act relating to proper lane travel for heavy vehicles.

Brief Description: Facilitating smoother flow of traffic.

Sponsors: Senators Horn, Wood, Prince, Winsley, Deccio and Johnson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/29/97, 2/6/97 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5177 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Prince, Chair; Wood, Vice Chair; Goings, Haugen, Heavey, Horn, Jacobsen, Morton, Oke, Patterson, Prentice and Rasmussen.

Staff: Mary McLaughlin (786-7309)

Background: On any highway with two or more lanes in one direction, all vehicles are to remain in the right lane then available for traffic except when overtaking another vehicle, traveling at a speed greater than the traffic flow, moving left to allow for merging traffic, or preparing to turn left.

In the state of California certain vehicles are restricted from using the left lane(s) on a multi-lane facility. On a highway with two lanes in the same direction, trucks must stay in the right lane except to pass. On a three-lane facility a truck must remain in the right lane and use the center lane to pass. On a highway with four or more lanes in the same direction, a truck must stay in the first two right lanes and can pass only in the third lane. The restrictions apply not only to trucks, but also to any vehicle pulling a trailer, school buses, a farm vehicle transporting passengers, a vehicle transporting explosives, etc.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Vehicles over 10,000 pounds are prohibited from driving in the left lane on a limited access highway with three or more lanes in the same direction. The exceptions are buses, a vehicle preparing to turn left, or an authorized vehicle traveling in a high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane. An HOV lane is not considered to be the left lane. The Department of Transportation (DOT), in consultation with the Washington State Patrol (WSP), must adopt rules providing exemptions under emergency circumstances or to facilitate the orderly flow of traffic. Possible examples include: (1) when the other two lanes are blocked with slow traffic; (2) when one or more lanes are blocked with military convoys; (3) when an overwidth load is occupying two lanes; (4) when a recent accident has occurred and the traffic has not yet been redirected by law enforcement; (5) when temporary signs

direct the use of the left lane; and (6) when an emergency vehicle or tow truck is responding to an emergency.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Buses are added to the exemptions and the restriction applies to limited access highways. Limited access means the entrances and exits to the highway are located at prescribed intervals and distances.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Keeping large vehicles out of the left lane will create a smoother flow of traffic and therefore increase the safety of the motoring public.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Horn, prime sponsor (pro); Lloyd Ensley, WSDOT (pro); Larry Pursley, Washington Trucking Association (pro); Captain Marsh Pugh, WSP (pro); Dan Snow, Washington Transit Association (pro); Steve Lindstrom, Community Transit (pro); Doug Levy, City of Everett (pro).