

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5078

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Transportation, February 13, 2007

Title: An act relating to approaching stationary emergency vehicles or police vehicles.

Brief Description: Implementing rules for drivers when approaching stationary emergency vehicles and police vehicles on highways having less than four lanes.

Sponsors: Senators Honeyford and Kline.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/07/07, 2/13/07 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5078 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Chair; Marr, Vice Chair; Murray, Vice Chair; Swecker, Ranking Minority Member; Berkey, Clements, Delvin, Eide, Holmquist, Kastama, Kauffman, Kilmer, Pflug and Spanel.

Staff: Dory Nicpon (786-7321)

Background: Current law requires that on highways with at least four lanes, two lanes of which are for traffic traveling in a single direction, drivers approaching a stationary emergency vehicle with a siren or flashing lights must proceed with caution, and if reasonable, yield the right-of-way by making a lane change or moving away from the emergency vehicle. If changing lanes would be unreasonable or unsafe, the driver must proceed with caution and reduce speed.

Current law requires that vehicles be driven on the right side of the roadway, except under specified circumstances such as when passing or on a one-way roadway. No vehicle may pass on the left side of the roadway unless authorized by statute, provided however, that the left side of the roadway must be free of oncoming traffic for a sufficient distance for the overtaking vehicle to pass without interfering with other vehicles or coming within 200 feet of approaching traffic.

Summary of Bill: On highways of less than four lanes, drivers approaching a stationary emergency vehicle with siren or flashing lights must proceed with caution, reduce speed, and if reasonable and safe, yield the right-of-way by passing to the left.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The circumstances under which a vehicle may be driven on the left side of a roadway is expanded to include when approaching a stationary emergency vehicle upon a highway of three or fewer lanes. The circumstances under which a vehicle may pass another vehicle on the left side of the roadway is expanded to include when approaching a stationary emergency vehicle with a siren or flashing lights, provided however, that the left side of the roadway must be free of oncoming traffic for a sufficient distance for the overtaking vehicle to pass without interfering with other vehicles or coming within 200 feet of approaching traffic.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY RECOMMENDED SUBSTITUTE AS PASSED COMMITTEE (Transportation): Stationary tow trucks using red lights and emergency assistance vehicles using warning lights are added to the list of vehicles to which motorists must yield the right-of-way.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill addresses an important safety issue. It will change motorist behavior, save lives, and reduce accidents.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Honeyford, prime sponsor; Captain Jeff DeVere, Washington State Patrol; Dave Overstreet, American Automobile Association of Washington; Ted Trepanier, Washington State Department of Transportation; Stu Halsan, Towing and Recovery Association.