

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1217

As Passed House:
January 30, 2012

Title: An act relating to local authorities altering maximum speed limits.

Brief Description: Authorizing certain local authorities to establish maximum speed limits on certain nonarterial highways.

Sponsors: House Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Representatives Ryu, Pedersen, Johnson, Klippert, Maxwell, Finn, Kenney, Santos, Springer, Ladenburg, Appleton, Liias, McCoy, Miloscia, Fitzgibbon, Kagi, Roberts and Billig).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 1/25/11, 1/27/11 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/7/11, 92-0.

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 1/30/12, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Allows cities and towns to establish 20 miles per hour maximum speed limits on nonarterial highways in business or residence districts without an engineering and traffic investigation.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 28 members: Representatives Clibborn, Chair; Billig, Vice Chair; Liias, Vice Chair; Armstrong, Ranking Minority Member; Hargrove, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Angel, Asay, Eddy, Finn, Fitzgibbon, Jinkins, Johnson, Klippert, Kristiansen, Ladenburg, McCune, Moeller, Morris, Moscoso, Overstreet, Reykdal, Rivers, Rodne, Ryu, Shea, Takko, Upthegrove and Zeiger.

Staff: David Munnecke (786-7315).

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.

Background:

State law sets the maximum speed limit at 25 miles per hour on city and town streets, 50 miles per hour on county roads, and 60 miles per hour on state highways. Local authorities may increase the maximum speed limit to 60 miles per hour or decrease the maximum speed limit to 20 miles per hour on a particular roadway on the basis of engineering and traffic investigations, but the alteration of a speed limit on a state highway must be approved by the Secretary of Transportation. Any altered speed limit goes into effect upon the erection of appropriate signs giving notice of the new maximum speed limit.

Speed limits are generally set to reflect the speed at which most motorists naturally drive, which is usually done by determining the speed that 85 percent of the vehicles on a roadway are traveling at or below. When setting speed limits, traffic engineers will also consider other relevant factors including:

- roadway characteristics such as shoulder condition, grade, alignment, and sight distance;
- roadside development and lighting;
- parking practices such as angled parking;
- pedestrian and bicycle activity;
- collision rates and traffic volume trends; and
- potential conflicts with vehicles entering the roadway.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Cities and towns may establish maximum speed limits of 20 miles per hour on nonarterial highways in business or residence districts without an engineering and traffic investigation. However, prior to establishing maximum speed limits of 20 miles per hour, cities and towns must develop procedures regarding the establishment of such speed limits. Cities and towns must also consult the manual on uniform traffic control devices when establishing such speed limits.

Maximum speed limits established without an engineering and traffic investigation may be cancelled within one year of establishment, and the previous maximum speed limit reestablished without an engineering and traffic investigation.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill allows for more local options and greater local control. Currently, local jurisdictions must engage in a traffic and engineering study before changing a speed limit. This bill gives the locals an option that allows them to avoid the cost of these studies, which are in the thousands of dollars.

Studies show that lower speed limits, along with more enforcement and education, reduces traffic deaths, especially among pedestrians. In collisions that occur between cars and pedestrians when the car is going 20 miles per hour, approximately 5 percent of the pedestrians are killed. This percentage increases to 45 percent when the car is going 30 miles per hour, and 80 percent when the car is going 40 miles per hour. In collisions between cars and pedestrians where the car is going more than 40 miles per hour, almost 100 percent of the pedestrians are killed. A car travelling at 40 miles per hour strikes a pedestrian with four times the force of a vehicle travelling at 20 miles per hour.

Many speed limits were lowered to 20 miles per hour in London recently in order to increase pedestrian safety. Afterwards, the city experienced a 40 percent decrease in pedestrian deaths and a 50 percent decrease in deaths of children that were pedestrians.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Ryu, prime sponsor; and Ted Inkley, Bicycle Alliance of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.