

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2317

As Reported by House Committee On: Transportation

Title: An act relating to expanding the use of neighborhood and medium-speed electric vehicles.

Brief Description: Expanding the use of neighborhood and medium-speed electric vehicles.

Sponsors: Representatives Van De Wege, Tharinger, Pettigrew, Moeller and Magendanz.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 1/13/16, 1/20/16 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Permits neighborhood and medium-speed electric vehicles on state highways with speed limits of 30 miles per hour or less.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 23 members: Representatives Clibborn, Chair; Farrell, Vice Chair; Fey, Vice Chair; Moscoso, Vice Chair; Orcutt, Ranking Minority Member; Hargrove, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Harmsworth, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Gregerson, Hayes, Hickel, Kochmar, McBride, Morris, Pike, Riccelli, Rodne, Rossetti, Sells, Shea, Stambaugh, Tarleton and Young.

Staff: Jennifer Harris (786-7143).

Background:

Neighborhood electric vehicles are defined by state law as self-propelled, electrically powered four-wheeled motor vehicles that can attain a speed between 20 and 25 miles per hour (mph) and must meet federal regulations for low-speed vehicles. Medium-speed electric vehicles are defined by state law as self-propelled, electrically powered four-wheeled motor vehicles that can attain a speed between 25 and 35 mph, are equipped with a roll cage or crush-proof body design, and must otherwise meet federal regulations for low-speed vehicles.

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.

Federal regulations require low-speed vehicles to be equipped with headlamps, front and rear turn signal lamps, tail lamps, stop lamps, reflex reflectors, a driver's side exterior mirror, a passenger's side exterior or interior mirror, a parking brake, a windshield conforming to federal standards, a Vehicle Identification Number, and a seat belt conforming to federal standards.

Neighborhood and medium-speed electric vehicles are currently prohibited from operation on state highways. They are, however, permitted to operate on other roadways in the state with a speed limit of 35 mph or less (and of 45 mph or less in island counties with no roadway connection to the mainland). To be operated on these roadways, these vehicles must be registered, display a vehicle license plate, and the person operating them must have a valid driver's license and a valid motor vehicle liability policy.

Local authorities may regulate the operation of neighborhood and medium-speed electric vehicles on streets and highways under their jurisdiction by resolution or ordinance so long as it is consistent with state law, but local authorities may not: (1) authorize the operation of either type of vehicle on any part of the state highways system; (2) prohibit the operation of either type of vehicle on highways with a speed limit of 25 mph or less; or (3) establish requirements for registration and licensing of either type of vehicle.

There are approximately 330 neighborhood electric vehicles and 80 medium-speed electric vehicles registered in Washington. Of the 7,072 centerline miles that comprise the state highway system, 229 centerline miles, or roughly 3 percent of the total, have speed limits at or below 30 mph. Just under half of this lower-speed state highway is located in Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)-designated urban areas (areas with populations of 5,000 or greater) and just over half is located in FHWA-designated rural areas.

Summary of Bill:

Neighborhood and medium-speed electric vehicles are permitted on state highways with speed limits of 30 mph or less. Restrictions on local authorities' ability to regulate the operation of neighborhood and medium-speed electric vehicles on roadways outside of the state highway system remain unchanged.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on April 1, 2016.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This is a bill to help a small business in Port Townsend. The company is starting out and would like to use medium-speed vehicles as a taxi service on a fixed route in Port Townsend. It needs to use a portion of a state highway for the route. This is a straightforward, safe thing to do. The route is in an active tourist area that is very crowded in the summer. This type of service is being provided in Denver and Portland, and is an ecologically-friendly way to get small numbers of people around small distances. These vehicles have 14-inch wheels, disk brakes, and other safety features. Jefferson Transit, the bus service in Port Townsend, has embraced the company and offered to let it use its bus stops. Everyone in Port Townsend is supportive. The problem is that, while vehicles can be operated on most roads with speed limits 35 miles per hour or under, they cannot be driven on any state highway, no matter what their speed limit. Many cars, electric vehicles, electric bicycles, and joggers use the road now because it is the only way to get downtown from the east.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Van De Wege, prime sponsor; and Myron Gauger.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.