

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 2181

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Transportation, March 23, 2015

Title: An act relating to the maximum speed limit on highways.

Brief Description: Modifying the maximum speed limit on highways.

Sponsors: Representatives Schmick, Clibborn, Orcutt and Scott.

Brief History: Passed House: 3/09/15, 78-19.

Committee Activity: Transportation: 3/18/15, 3/23/15 [DP, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators King, Chair; Benton, Vice Chair; Fain, Vice Chair; Hobbs, Ranking Minority Member; Cleveland, Habib, Jayapal, Miloscia, Pedersen and Sheldon.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Liias, Assistant Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Kim Johnson (786-7472)

Background: State law generally sets the maximum speed limit for city and town streets at 25 miles per hour, county roads at 50 miles per hour, and state highways at 60 miles per hour. The Secretary of Transportation may decrease a maximum speed limit on any segment of a highway, based on an engineering and traffic investigation demonstrating that a maximum speed is greater than is reasonable or safe. The Secretary may also increase the maximum speed limit on any highway above the limit in statute, but may not set the maximum speed limit above 70 miles per hour.

Local authorities, on the basis of an engineering and traffic investigation, may increase the maximum speed limit up to 60 miles per hour or decrease the maximum speed limit down to 20 miles per hour on a particular roadway. However, the alteration of a speed limit on a state highway by a city or town must be approved by the Secretary of Transportation.

In practice, speed limits are generally set to reflect the speed at which most motorists naturally drive, typically the speed at or below which 85 percent of the drivers are traveling.

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.

When determining appropriate speed limits, traffic engineers may also consider other relevant factors including the following:

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

Summary of Bill: The Secretary of Transportation is authorized to increase the maximum speed limit on a state highway up to 75 miles per hour.

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: OTHER: Raising speed limits should be a deliberative process to ensure safety. We are committed to working with our partners to make sure that safety remains a top priority. We would approach the flexibility provided in this bill the same way in which the department approached the increase in interstate speed limits from 55 miles per hour to 65 miles per hour.

Persons Testifying: OTHER: Alison Camden, WA State Dept. of Transportation.

Persons Signed in to Testify But Not Testifying: No one.