

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5228

As of January 28, 2015

Title: An act relating to adjusting the maximum speed limit for Interstate 90 in rural counties.

Brief Description: Adjusting the maximum speed limit for Interstate 90 in rural counties.

Sponsors: Senators Baumgartner, Dansel, Padden, Benton and Warnick.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/27/15.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

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. 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.

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.

Summary of Bill: The maximum speed limit for Interstate 90 in a rural county is set at 75 miles per hour.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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: The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has some concerns. Raising the speed limit should be part of a deliberative process. One of our concerns is creating too great a speed differential between trucks and passenger vehicles. We would like the ability to talk to other states that have this kind of differential and see how best to proceed. We think that there may be some safety issues with simply raising the speed limit on an entire stretch of I-90 that travels over diverse terrain.

The Traffic Safety Commission's concern is that this has the potential to increase death and injuries and therefore is contrary to our goal of zero traffic-related deaths by 2030. Speeding-related fatalities already occur along this stretch of roadway. The higher the speed, the less time you have to correct and avoid a crash.

Speed is one of the major contributing factors to crashes on I-90 today. We would like to work with WSDOT and help to determine where increasing the speed limit may be appropriate and where it may not be.

Persons Testifying: OTHER: Allison Camden, WSDOT; Rob Huss, WA State Patrol; Shelly Baldwin, WA Traffic Safety Commission.