

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5053

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As of January 24, 2017

**Title:** An act relating to adjusting the maximum speed limit for certain segments of Interstate 90.

**Brief Description:** Adjusting the maximum speed limit for certain segments of Interstate 90.

**Sponsors:** Senators Dansel, Darneille, Mullet and Palumbo.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Transportation: 1/23/17.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Increases the speed limit to 75 miles per hour (mph) on certain sections of Interstate 90.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

**Staff:** Kim Johnson (786-7472)

**Background:** State law generally sets the maximum speed limit for state highways at 60 mph. The Secretary of Transportation (Secretary) 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 what 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 75 mph.

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:

- 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.

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*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.*

In 2015, the Legislature passed HB 2181, authorizing the Secretary to increase the maximum speed up to 75 mph. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) subsequently conducted an engineering and traffic study examining whether to raise the speed limit on I-90 to 75 mph. The WSDOT announced the decision to not raise the speed limit in May of 2016.

**Summary of Bill:** The maximum speed limit for Interstate 90 is set at 75 mph for the following segments:

- from Ellensburg to mile post 120; and
- from mile post 150, near George, to mile post 255 at the Spokane county border.

Removes the Secretary's authority to reduce the speed limit for the two specified segments of Interstate 90.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** CON: As a person who lives in this area of the state, I can tell you I don't think increasing the speed limit on I-90 is a safe thing to do. This does not comport with a recent study WSDOT conducted and this change will not really save anyone any significant time.

WSDOT thanks the Legislature for the approach they took when passing HB 2181, which gave the WSDOT Secretary the authority to increase the speed limit up to 75 mph if it is safe to do so. WSDOT conducted a traffic and engineering study, held public meetings, and worked closely with our other public safety agencies and came to the conclusion that safety risks and costs of this policy greatly outweigh the limited time savings that would be produced by an increase to the speed limit. WSDOT's analysis showed that an increase to the speed limit could likely increase fatal crashes. We also see a conflict with truck traffic that are limited to 60 mph and this speed differential is not safe.

The strategic highway plan guides where we put emphasis patrols. Speed plays a significant role in crashes and deaths have increased over the past year. We want to see that trend in the downward direction.

**Persons Testifying:** CON: Jim Halstrom, citizen; Allison Camden, WSDOT; Monica Alexander, WSP; Shelly Baldwin, Traffic Safety Commission.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.