
Transportation Committee

HB 1605

Brief Description: Creating a program to provide for improved safety on roadways to prevent vehicle lane departures.

Sponsors: Representatives Corry, Abbarno, Caldier, Eslick, Walsh, Robertson, Barkis, Boehnke, Chase, Graham, Griffey, Chambers and Young.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes a Reducing Rural Roadway Departures program in the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to provide funding for safety improvements to prevent lane departures in areas where the departure is likely to cause serious injuries or death.
- Allows the WSDOT to make improvements on state, county, small city, or town roads in rural areas that have a high risk of incidents of serious injuries or fatalities due to vehicle lane departures, with the permission from the entities that maintain the roadway. The bill allows local jurisdictions to apply to the WSDOT for safety improvements funding.
- Requires the WSDOT to provide a list of the locations receiving funding from the program with a description of the safety improvements to the transportation committees and the Washington Traffic Safety Commission by December 31 each year.
- Directs the WSDOT to track the effectiveness of the program for the first five years.
- Makes several amendatory changes to implement the program.

Hearing Date: 1/17/22

Staff: Christine Thomas (786-7142).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

The Strategic Highway Safety Plan: Target Zero. The Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC) oversees efforts to improve safety on Washington's public highways. The WTSC is the federally recognized highway safety office in Washington. It collects fatal and serious-injury crash data, engages in research, and oversees highway safety pilot projects. The WTSC also prepares the federally required Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP), which is known in Washington as the Target Zero Plan. Federal law requires that the state's SHSP be coordinated with the state's Highway Safety Plan, Commercial Vehicle Safety Plan, and the Highway Safety Improvement Program. This coordination includes harmonizing certain performance measures and targets. The role of the SHSP is to support the state's efforts to achieve these targets by establishing appropriate goals and objectives, outlining emphasis areas, and presenting effective strategies. The Target Zero Plan began in 2000 and set a goal of zero deaths and serious injuries on Washington's roadways by 2030. The plan is updated every three years and the 2019 Target Zero Plan is the latest edition and the fifth version of the safety road map.

Lane Departure Crash Type. According to the Target Zero Plan, lane departure crashes involve a vehicle unintentionally leaving its lane of travel. This includes both vehicles leaving a lane to the right (run-off-the-road crashes), as well as vehicles leaving a lane to the left (either opposite direction crashes or run-off-the-road crashes). Lane departure crashes comprise 48 percent of traffic fatalities in Washington and 38 percent of serious injuries due to traffic crashes based on the 2015-2017 data used to develop the 2019 Target Zero Plan. Lane departure crashes are considered a Priority Level One factor set in the state's Highway Safety Plan based on the percentage of traffic fatalities and serious injuries associated with each factor. They are second in the priority list only to traffic crashes where impairment was involved.

Key issues for lane departures include roadside conditions, horizontal (left- or right-turn) curves, and nighttime and lighting conditions. The latest Target Zero Plan identifies strategies and objectives for positive change for lane departures and they include: (1) making road safety plans at the local level, which use a systemic approach to identifying priority locations to be addressed; (2) giving roadways high friction surface treatments that greatly increase the friction between vehicle tires and the roadway; and (3) improve roadway visibility, including upgraded signing, pavement markings, roadway lighting, and delineation.

Rural Roads. There are a number of challenges and issues specific to addressing safety on rural roads as compared to more urban roads around the state. Many rural roads were not intentionally designed and instead developed over time, even before cars, as the paths people would take to or from their residence or farm to town, to neighboring properties, or to more distant locations. Eventually those paths were upgraded and paved over to make travel easier. But without intentional design, these roads did not have the safety of the user as a significant element in how and where the roads came to be.

Other key challenges for achieving Target Zero goals in rural areas include: (1) engineering limitations due to insufficient infrastructure to implement the strategies identified to reduce lane

departure crashes, or low-cost solutions for initial installations that are high cost to maintain for limited agency budgets; (2) enforcement challenges on rural roads that do not have locations for law enforcement officers to observe traffic or safe locations to pull drivers over; (3) large road systems with low-crash concentrations per vehicle miles traveled despite that between 2008 and 2013, nearly three of every five traffic fatalities occurred from crashes on rural roadways. The Target Zero Plan identifies a few approaches to reduce rural traffic safety crashes including spreading low-cost county road improvements across the state to maximize the benefits of those improvements.

Summary of Bill:

Reducing Rural Roadway Departures Program. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is directed to establish a Reducing Rural Roadway Departures Program (program) to provide funding for safety improvements to prevent lane departures in areas where the departure is likely to cause serious injuries or death. Funding under the program may be used for improvements such as: (1) widening roadway shoulders or modifying roadway design to improve visibility; (2) improving markings and paint on roadways; (3) applying high friction surface treatments; (4) installing rumble strips, signage, lighting, and other infrastructure; (5) removing or relocating fixed objects that pose significant risk of serious injury or death; (6) repairing or replacing existing barriers that are damaged or nonfunctional; and (7) taking other reasonable actions to prevent vehicle lane departures in areas of concern. The WSDOT is allowed to make these improvements on state, county, small city, or town roads in rural areas that have a high risk of incidents of serious injuries or fatalities due to vehicle lane departures, with the permission from the entities that maintain the roadway. Towns, small cities, counties, and transportation benefit districts may apply to the WSDOT for safety improvements funding for high-risk areas in their jurisdiction in need of safety improvements. Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for the program, the WSDOT is directed to distribute the funding in a geographically diverse manner throughout the state and may use a community's inability or lack of resources as part of its criteria in selecting locations for funding.

Reporting Requirements and Program Implementation. The WSDOT is required to provide a list of the locations that received funding from the program with a description of the safety improvements to the transportation committees and the WTSC by December 31 each year. During the first five years of the program, the WSDOT must track incidence of lane departures at the locations where the new infrastructure is installed and evaluate the effectiveness of the safety improvements. Statutory changes are made to include the program in the definition of the WSDOT's Preservation Program and allows the program to be funded from the Highway Safety Account.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 11, 2022.

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

passed.