

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5177

As Reported By House Committee On:

Transportation Policy & Budget

Title: An act relating to proper lane travel for heavy vehicles.

Brief Description: Facilitating smoother flow of traffic.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Horn, Wood, Prince, Winsley, Deccio and Johnson).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation Policy & Budget: 4/3/97, 4/7/97 [DPA].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION POLICY & BUDGET

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 26 members: Representatives K. Schmidt, Chairman; Hankins, Vice Chairman; Mielke, Vice Chairman; Mitchell, Vice Chairman; Fisher, Ranking Minority Member; Blalock, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cooper, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Backlund; Buck; Cairnes; Chandler; Constantine; DeBolt; Gardner; Hatfield; Johnson; Murray; O'Brien; Ogden; Radcliff; Robertson; Romero; Scott; Skinner; Wood and Zellinsky.

Staff: Mary McLaughlin (786-7309).

Background: On any highway with two or more lanes in one direction, all vehicles are to remain in the right lane then available for traffic except when overtaking another vehicle, traveling at a speed greater than the traffic flow, moving left to allow for merging traffic, or preparing to turn left.

In the state of California certain vehicles are restricted from using the left lane(s) on a multi-lane facility. On a highway with two lanes in the same direction, trucks must stay in the right lane except to pass. On a three-lane facility a truck must remain in the right lane and use the center lane to pass. On a highway with four or more lanes in the same direction, a truck must stay in the first two right lanes and can pass only in the third lane. The restrictions apply not only to trucks, but also to any vehicle pulling a trailer, a school bus, a farm vehicle transporting passengers, a vehicle transporting explosives, etc.

Summary of Amended Bill: Any vehicle towing a trailer or any vehicle over 10,000 pounds is prohibited from driving in the left lane on a limited access highway with three or more lanes in the same direction. The exceptions are a vehicle preparing to turn left or an authorized vehicle traveling in a high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane. An HOV lane is not considered to be the left lane. The Department of Transportation (DOT), in consultation with the Washington State Patrol (WSP), must adopt rules providing exemptions (a) under emergency circumstances or to facilitate the orderly flow of traffic, and (b) for certain segments of three-lane limited access roadway, due to the operational characteristics of the highway.

Examples of exemptions under emergency circumstances or to facilitate a smoother flow of traffic include (1) when the other two lanes are blocked with slow traffic; (2) when one or more lanes are blocked with military convoys; (3) when an overwidth load is occupying two lanes; (4) when a recent accident has occurred and the traffic has not yet been redirected by law enforcement; (5) when temporary signs direct the use of the left lane; and (6) when an emergency vehicle or tow truck is responding to an emergency.

An example of an exemption due to the operational characteristics of the highway is several miles through downtown Seattle where both exits and entrances are located on the left. All lanes are needed through this area in order to keep the traffic flowing in a reasonable manner.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill: Buses are removed as an exemption; any vehicle towing a trailer is added to the prohibition, and certain segments of highway may be exempt due to operational characteristics.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: Keeping large vehicles out of the left lane will create a smoother flow of traffic and therefore increase the safety of the motoring public.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Captain Marsh Pugh, Washington State Patrol; Bill Stauffacher, Hesselgrave Bus Charters; and Dave Peach, Department of Transportation.