

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1217

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Transportation, February 22, 2012

Title: An act relating to local authorities altering maximum speed limits.

Brief Description: Authorizing certain local authorities to establish maximum speed limits on certain nonarterial highways.

Sponsors: House Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Representatives Ryu, Pedersen, Johnson, Klippert, Maxwell, Finn, Kenney, Santos, Springer, Ladenburg, Appleton, Lias, McCoy, Miloscia, Fitzgibbon, Kagi, Roberts and Billig).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/07/11, 92-0; 1/30/12, 96-0.

Committee Activity: Transportation: 3/14/11, 2/16/12, 2/22/12 [DPA, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Chair; Eide, Vice Chair; Fain, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Frockt, Hill, Litzow, Prentice, Ranker, Rolfes and Swecker.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Sheldon.

Staff: Kim Johnson (786-7472)

Background: State law sets the maximum speed limit at 25 miles per hour on city and town streets, 50 miles per hour on county roads, and 60 miles per hour on state highways. Local authorities may increase the maximum speed limit to 60 miles per hour or decrease the maximum speed limit to 20 miles per hour on a particular roadway on the basis of engineering and traffic investigations, but the alteration of a speed limit on a state highway must be approved by the Secretary of Transportation. Any altered speed limit goes into effect upon the erection of appropriate signs giving notice of the new maximum speed limit.

In practice, speed limits are generally set to reflect the speed at which most motorists naturally drive, which is usually done by determining the speed that 85 percent of the vehicles on a roadway are traveling at or below. When setting speed limits, traffic engineers may also consider other relevant factors including:

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

Summary of Bill (Recommended Amendments): Cities and towns may establish maximum speed limits of 20 miles per hour on nonarterial highways in business or residence districts without an engineering and traffic investigation. However, prior to establishing maximum speed limits of 20 miles per hour, cities and towns must develop procedures regarding the establishment of such speed limits. A city or town adopting a lower speed limit must also hold a public hearing on lowering the speed limit and the hearing must be at a time when the people most impacted by the lower speed limit can attend. The legislative action by a city or town lowering a speed limit is subject to referendum, if the city or town has such procedures in place. Cities and towns must also consult the manual on uniform traffic control devices when establishing such speed limits.

Any county with a state university extension office located on a state highway within its jurisdiction may lower the speed limit on the state highway without conducting an engineering and traffic investigation and without the approval of the Secretary of Transportation.

Maximum speed limits established without an engineering and traffic investigation may be cancelled within one year of establishment, and the previous maximum speed limit reestablished without an engineering and traffic investigation.

Law enforcement are prohibited from placing a speed trap on a nonarterial highway or state highway where the speed limit was lowered pursuant to this act.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Amendments): Provides that any county that has a state university extension office located on a state highway within its jurisdiction may lower the speed limit on the state highway beyond the limit set in statute. A county taking such action would not have to do an engineering and traffic investigation analysis and also would not need the Secretary of Transportation's approval in order to lower the speed limit.

Specifies that a city or town adopting a lower speed limit must hold a public hearing on lowering the speed limit and the hearing must be at a time when the people most impacted by the lower speed limit can attend. Also, the legislative action by a city or town lowering a speed limit is subject to referendum. Establishes a prohibition on law enforcement speed traps on a nonarterial highway or state highway where the speed limit was lowered pursuant to this act.

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 as Heard in Committee: PRO: This bill will save lives and reduce costs to cities. The traffic analysis required under current law is too expensive and burdensome to apply to every neighborhood street. It is permissible and just gives cities and towns the authority to create safer neighborhoods. We have many neighborhoods clamoring for traffic calming options to make their streets safer for children. If we use the 20 mph limit authorized under this bill judiciously, it can be a great benefit to neighborhoods where other traffic calming measures are not appropriate. We have had over 27 non-motorized fatalities in the city of Spokane. We need more tools in our tool box. No one is going to implement a 20 mph zone throughout a whole city. We are looking to our citizens to tell us where they need a slower speed limit. This bill is not about the major arterial streets you travel on, this is about neighborhood streets. This is critical. This is not a speed-trap bill.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Ryu, prime sponsor; Jon Snyder, city of Spokane; Douglas MacDonald, citizen; Sally Clark, city of Seattle; Barbara Culp, Bicycle Alliance of WA.