

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5066

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Transportation, February 5, 2013

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: Senators Billig, Litzow, Eide, Frockt and Rolfes.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/29/13, 2/05/13 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Benton, Vice Co-Chair; Eide, Co-Chair; King, Co-Chair; Billig, Brown, Carrell, Ericksen, Fain, Budget Leadership Cabinet; Harper, Hobbs, Mullet, Rolfes, Schlicher, Sheldon and Smith.

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. 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:

- 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;

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- collision rates and traffic volume trends; and
- potential conflicts with vehicles entering the roadway.

Summary of Bill: Cities and towns may establish a maximum speed limit of 20 miles per hour on nonarterial highways in business or residence districts without an engineering and traffic investigation. However, prior to establishing a maximum speed limit of 20 miles per hour, cities and towns must develop procedures regarding the establishment of such speed limits. Cities and towns must also consult the manual on uniform traffic control devices when establishing such speed limits.

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.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill does not require anyone to lower a speed limit. It is about local control. Lowered speeds on nonarterial streets can save lives. This bill will give local governments some flexibility to avoid costly engineering and traffic investigations and red tape. This is a great safety-related tool that allows local governments to address local neighborhood and business district concerns. The average risk of severe injury or death for a 70-year old pedestrian struck by a car travelling at 25 miles per hour is the same as a 30-year old who is struck at 35 miles per hour. This bill will promote healthy neighborhoods by keeping both the elderly and others active. We have an obesity problem in this state and this bill will help keep people moving. This bill is also about preserving and possibly improving property values; people are looking for a safe neighborhood to raise their families.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Barb Chamberlain, Bicycle Alliance of WA; Alison Hellberg, Assn. of WA Cities; Peggy Quan, American Assn. of Retired Persons; Vic Colman, Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition.