

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2197

As Passed House:
February 16, 2020

Title: An act relating to establishing an exception to the requirement that vehicle license plates be visible at all times for vehicles using certain cargo carrying devices.

Brief Description: Establishing an exception to the requirement that vehicle license plates be visible at all times for vehicles using certain cargo carrying devices.

Sponsors: Representatives Thai, McCaslin, Walen, Slatter, Tarleton, Appleton, Orwall, Shewmake and Wylie.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 1/22/20, 1/29/20 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/16/20, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Provides the display of a single license plate properly attached to a vehicle that has two license plates properly attached may be temporarily obstructed by a trailer hitch; a wheelchair lift or wheelchair carrier; a trailer being towed by the vehicle; or a bicycle rack, ski rack, or luggage rack.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 31 members: Representatives Fey, Chair; Wylie, 1st Vice Chair; Slatter, 2nd Vice Chair; Valdez, 2nd Vice Chair; Barkis, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Young, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boehnke, Chambers, Chapman, Dent, Doglio, Duerr, Dufault, Entenman, Eslick, Goehner, Gregerson, Irwin, Kloba, Lovick, McCaslin, Mead, Orcutt, Ortiz-Self, Paul, Ramos, Riccelli, Shewmake, Van Werven and Volz.

Staff: Beth Redfield (786-7140).

Background:

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.

Vehicles required to be registered with the Department of Licensing (DOL) must display license plates or decals assigned by the DOL. License plates must be:

1. attached conspicuously at the front and rear of each vehicle if two license plates have been issued;
2. kept clean and be able to be plainly seen and read at all times; and
3. attached in a horizontal position at a distance of not more than 4 feet from the ground.

The Washington State Patrol may grant exceptions to the above license plate display requirements if the body construction of the vehicle makes compliance impossible.

Summary of Bill:

Provided the requirements specified below are met, the display of a single license plate properly attached to a vehicle that has two license plates properly attached may be temporarily obstructed by one or more of the following devices by the cargo the device is carrying:

- a trailer hitch;
- a wheelchair lift or wheelchair carrier;
- a trailer being towed by the vehicle, provided the trailer meets any applicable trailer license plate requirements; or
- a bicycle rack, ski rack, or luggage rack.

In order for the above license plate visibility exception to apply, the device must be installed according to manufacturer specifications or generally accepted installation practices, and the device or cargo the device is carrying must not prevent the license plate from being read from one or more accessible viewing angles when the vehicle is parked, except if the device is a trailer that meets trailer license plate requirements.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This is a common sense bill allowing partial obstructions of license plates which are temporary in nature. Individuals do not have any intention to break the law. Washington was named the number one bike-friendly state seven years in a row; yet a person can be ticketed for having a bike rack on a car. Any parking lot will turn up many illegal bike racks. In Tacoma, the policy is that if an officer cannot read the license plate, they should pull the car over to read the plate, but should not write a ticket.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Thai, prime sponsor; and Bob Ellis.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.