

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5360

As of February 16, 2023

Title: An act relating to vehicle combinations that may be operated on public highways.

Brief Description: Concerning vehicle combinations that may be operated on public highways.

Sponsors: Senator MacEwen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/16/23.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Washington State Department of Transportation to allow combinations of vehicles consisting of a truck tractor and three trailing units to operate on designated highways, but only if the federal government first approves the action.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Staff: Brandon Popovac (786-7465)

Background: Vehicle Combinations. Generally, it is unlawful to operate on public highways any combination of vehicles consisting of more than two vehicles. However, the addition of another axle to the tractor of a truck tractor-semitrailer or pole trailer combination that supports a proportional share of the load of the semitrailer or pole trailer is not deemed a separate vehicle and is part of the truck tractor. Generally, the maximum combined length allowed for a combination consisting of a tractor and two trailers is 61 feet.

Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act. The stated objective of the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) is for states to develop and operate an enforcement process that identifies vehicles of excessive size and weight,

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and provides a systematic approach to eliminate violations and improve highway conditions. ISTEA, in effect, imposed a freeze on states to restrict the operation of longer combination vehicles (LCV) on the interstate system to the type of vehicles in use on or before June 1, 1991. Under ISTEA, an LCV is a combination of a tractor and two or more trailing units weighing more than 80,000 pounds that operates on the interstate. Because of the freeze, states that did not allow LCV operations before June 1, 1991, are precluded from allowing them or from lifting restrictions that governed LCV operations as of that date.

Summary of Bill: The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) must allow combinations of vehicles consisting of a truck tractor and three trailing units to operate on designated highways, but only if the federal government approves a variance to the existing freeze of state law imposed by ISTEA. WSDOT may also specify by rule other operating conditions to ensure a safe and efficient highway system. WSDOT must collect certain data regarding the allowance of such vehicle combinations on public highways, and submit an annual status and performance report on the implementation of the variance.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: There are 17 states that currently allow triple trailers on public highways, including Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. The bill does not increase the weight load allowed on such trailers. Such use might result in a 10 to 35 percent carbon reduction. There is a shortage of commercial drivers that could be more adequately addressed with authorizing more trailers. There is no data that triple trailer use is a less safe method to transport goods. Such use provides for a more efficient freight transportation system across states. Transporting more products with multiple trailers makes products less expensive. Disembarking trailers at state borders is a time consuming effort. With rising fuel prices, this bill will save on fuel costs and reduce carbon emissions. Commercial drivers have little to no access to overnight parking when trailers disembarked at state borders. Triple trailers are already limited in operations under certain weather restrictions. Triple trailers have a better safety record than some single or double trailers. Triple trailer drivers are usually the most senior and experienced. The bill will result in increased environmental benefits, including a 16 percent reduction in diesel miles driven compared to total miles driven. Triple trailers generally operate at slower speeds. A controlled and limited pilot would be extremely helpful to explore the benefits of this bill. CON: Traffic terrain and highway infrastructure are reasons for not legalizing triple trailer use. Highways are typically more congested than not. Safety rest and station areas are insufficient to accommodate triple trailers. Any slight movement of the steering wheel creates move ripples in trailer combos.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Drew MacEwen, Prime Sponsor; Mark Johnson, Washington Retail Association; Sheri Call, Washington Trucking Associations; Todd Walburn, United Parcel Service; Tim Vander Pol, Peninsula Truck Lines Inc.; Scott Goodrich, Old Dominion Freight Lines Inc.; Mike Ennis, Association of Washington Business.

CON: Mike Responte, Teamsters 174.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.